赤松中学
緋弾のアリアIX
Aria the Scarlet Ammo
蒼き閃光（スパーク・アウト）
MF文庫J

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メディアファクトリー

緋弾のアリアIX　蒼き閃光

東京武偵高校。そこは武力を行使する探偵――通称「武偵」を育成する特殊な学校。強襲科の超エリートでSランクの最強武偵・アリアのパートナーに選ばれてしまった（普段は）ただの一般人・遠山キンジ。犯罪組織『イ・ウー』の崩壊により始まった二つの連盟――『師団』と『眷属』の争いに巻き込まれたアリアとキンジ。ワトソンとの戦いを終えたキンジの前に現れたのは、ヒルダ側に寝返った理子だった。ヒルダにもてあそばれる理子の心にキンジの呼びかけは届くのか!?　穏やかに進む文化祭、そして迫り来る大いなる恐怖――。大スケールアクション＆ラブコメディー第9弾!!

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Aria the Scarlet Ammo

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赤松中学

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緋弾のアリアIX
スパーク・アウト 蒼き閃光

赤松中学

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祝!!
9巻!!
■今回の表紙は1巻ぶりのアリアということで
気合入れました!!
刀バージョンはコミック版では出てましたが
私は描くのは初めてなので
いつもと勝手が違う感じではありましたが
楽しかったです。
さて次はいよいよ10巻ですね!
今回もラストが「ええっ!」というヒキでしたので
次巻が楽しみです。

1st Ammo: Spark Witch - Dracula Hilda-

"--Watson!"

Turbulent hot wind blew my hair into a mess, as I yelled over the sound of crackling electricity.

Feeling the searing light fade away, I rubbed my eyes to clear my vision.

"....."

Having been struck by the lightning orb from above, Watson was sprawled on the floor of the First Observation Deck.

I rushed over immediately, and saw that the black bulletproof jacket she was wearing was now spread open like a towel, the hood of her cloak covered her head, giving the appearance of a turtle which had retreated into its shell.

"Are you all right.. Watson!"

"... I.. I'm.. not. Ever since the encounter with that Demoness Hilda, I have always.. planned to strengthen the electrical protection of my gear... However, my apologies Tohyama.. I need.. to rest for a while..."

Talking up till this point, Watson stopped moving.

How did things come to this.

I had pursued Watson, who had taken Aria with him and fled to the Sky Tree -- finally engaging him in a life & death duel for 23 minutes.

Known as a superb first class fighter, his... no, her fighting skills were extraordinary. Even with my fighting capabilities 1.7 times

stronger than that of HSS Normal while I was in HSS Berserker mode, I was subjected to a very tough battle.

And despite her strength, even Watson--

In a single strike, lost consciousness in just 5 seconds.

Unheard of and never seen before. A spherical lightning orb with a diameter of less than 2 meters... That was the appearance of the object that had hit her from above.

It wouldn't be wrong to assume that this was an attack from Hilda.

After all, the Bat-girl from Grenada had ambushed us half a month ago using high voltage electricity.

Only this time the attack is much more powerful--

(If there was another shot now.....!)

This is not good.

Our movements are now thoroughly exposed to higher ground--the Second Observation Deck which has been taken over by Hilda.

As the First Observation Deck we were on was still in its construction phase, other than steel beams, there was no ceiling to act as cover.

(I need to hide Watson for now....)

Carrying the unconscious Watson, I prepared to fall back from the area for now.

However, whether due to an outage in the electricity supply or other reasons... The elevator did not respond when I pressed the button.

Left with no choice, I could only take the staircase used for construction work to make my way down. Encountering a door on the way down, I kicked it open.

Behind the door was a room full of water pipes that were stored messily.

--Even though the space is very small, but it should be safe at least.

After putting Watson down, I flipped open my phone to use it as a light source.

"…….?"

There was something strange on the screen of the phone.

Black words on a white background displaying: "Error Code 961 Signal Interference".

Even pressing the call button resulted in a 'Please Hold' tone from the phone, there was no way to make any calls. Sending messages was out of the question as well.

"Hey, Watson, pull yourself together."

Ignoring the situation, and using the phone screen as a source of light, I shook Watson who was seated and leaning against the wall---and she slowly regained consciousness.

"….. Tohyama... Where.. Where is this place...?"

"Relax, we are below the First Observation Deck. Around us are concrete walls."

"Than... Thanks... Aria... Aria is on the Second Observation Deck, Hilda is there as well... Since I brought Aria here... I must bear the responsibility. So please, as someone who cares for Aria as well... Please...! Help her... save Aria.....!"

"--Don't worry, my intention has always been to bring Aria back with me. The opponent has simply changed from you to Hilda, that's all."

Upon hearing my words, relief showed in Watson's eyes--

Then, using both of her trembling hands, she handed me her sword.

"This, this Holy Cross Sword, I'll pass it to you... use it well. You've seen it before, Hilda... loathes this."

Looking at Watson who was straining just to speak, I furrowed my eyebrows.

This sword... It's not the first time I've seen it right?

Even though is seemed vaguely familiar, but I couldn't remember when it made an impression on me.

"Is that so? You can't remember? When Hilda... Tohyama, remember the battle on Sotobori Dori[1]?"

"Ahhh... that time you appeared and chased Hilda away, I remember now."

"..... That's correct, however, I was actually putting on an act then--so as deceive everyone... Tohyama, just take the sword, normal weapons have no effect on Hilda."

Of course--Hilda is the daughter of Vlad, and is a monster that possesses unlimited regenerative abilities.

Even though I am not proficient in the use of weapons able to deal with the supernatural, now isn't the time to nit-pick over such matters.

I took the silver sword, and Watson took out a concealed Saxon hunting knife, passing it to me as well.

The Holy Cross Sword was very long, and the blade will slightly show under my jacket..... better to conceal it under my clothes. With the strap as a support, the sword won't drop off.

Looking on as I accepted both items, Watson again passed me a small compressed-air type injector.

"Nebula... a stimulant to the central nervous system. Under normal conditions it can increase concentration when injected into the body, and is a much stronger steroid compared to Latzo when one is losing consciousness. There's still one dose left."

"Why don't you use it? My body is quite resistant to drugs. The paralysis drug you used on my eye previously--it wasn't very effective."

"This.. having this readily available will just be somewhat reassuring,"

Watson shook her head, and looked up towards the ceiling.

"Hilda... is a 'Spark Witch'. She is able to manipulate electricity, because of the genes from the African Knifefish.... it's a type of electric fish. This has given her body cells the ability to store electricity--which is also the biological ability to use electricity generated by the body. What's worse, is that she also possesses a supernatural ability which can be used in combination....."

So in short it's a high level combination of a freak and an ability user?

This is just downright unfortunate.

"Her witchcraft---or ability, is being able to manipulate atoms using electricity. Simply put, to convert surrounding material into atoms, and attract or repel the atoms from there. Although this requires a vast amount of concentration, the effective radius is very small, and the rate of success is low, however... if combined with the ability to generate electricity, a positively charged lightning orb can be created..... Or she can dissolve the ground beneath her feet, and move herself around like a shadow."

Truth be told I don't know if the explanation is truly accurate...

Hilda may look as if she is able to move as a shadow, but in reality it was not an actual shadow, it's more like dissolving herself into a pool of muddy water. I expressed my own views to Watson.

"Hilda is a very intelligent woman, I believe she will not rely solely on these abilities. She has the Suggestive Arts--an ancient form of hypnotism. This will render others to listen to your instructions, while forgetting everything else, it's pretty useful. This may be the reason why you do not remember much of the incident at Sotobori

Dori."

"Vampire, super powers and hypnotism. What a triple whammy, it's a goddamn Grand Slam[2]."

Maybe it was to prevent myself from feeling demoralised any further, I used a term from Mahjong which Riko had taught me over the summer, flashing a bitter smile.

Perhaps sensing my mood, Watson looked me straight in the eye.

"Tohyama, indeed, Hilda is a very strong opponent, that is why I handed Aria over to Grenada. Maybe you have already noticed--I have made contact with Hilda before all this started. The incident at Sotobori Dori was simply an act between Hilda and myself in order to gain Aria's trust..... Even so, the Holy Cross Sword and Purified Silver Bullets I have given you will no doubt be a headache for her. This is why I handed them to you, as long as you are bent on declaring war against Grenada--"

"I already had my suspicions to what you have just told me..... But you should stop worrying, I have no intention to back down, if I did, I'll lose the right to call myself the team leader of Team Baskerville."

Looking at me jokingly make the remarks, Watson attempted to stand up. However, using all her strength, she could only lift her hips slightly.

"Tohyama... I, I want to fight too....!"

"There's no need. You can't even stand, plus cute girls shouldn't force themselves."

Hearing me say 'cute'--

Bam.

Watson fell back where she was sitting, in a state of shock.

"Ah.. you said... cute..."

She stammered while repeating what I said, staring at me as if in a trance.

Was it that much of a shock?

Ahhh.

Watson has always been living with a male identity, and probably has never been treated as a girl, so the shock must have been due to this.

Although I can understand her reaction, but--

Having came to the Sky Tree in HSS Berseker mode, I seemed to have activated my HSS normal mode while carrying Watson just now, so as of now I'm in a state where the 2 modes are interchanging.

..... Once I entered such a state, while I still be able to carry her so gently?

The system of HSS modes is really troublesome.

"--Do you know of anything else concerning Hilda?"

Not sure if it was due to Hysteria mode, my concern for Aria grew.

As it was more or less time to strike back, I stood up and carried the silver sword on my back.

"If you are going by yourself.. it will be one against two, Tohyama."

"Hilda never fully trusted me, so I have never seen the other person, but it appears there is definitely someone helping her, and that person is moving in the background tonight as well."

"So there is another enemy. This is getting somewhat out of hand."

Looking at me sigh, Watson said,

"Do your best Tohyama, there is still a chance to win this. We, of Liberty Mason have always been battling such enemies, and have

defeated them before."

She was trying to encourage me with her words, really such an optimistic child.

".... Well, I'll just have to try my hand."

Thank you, Watson.

This will be enough.

While in Hysteria mode, being able to obtain support from females is a huge encouragement. The strength of the foes no longer matter. Nevertheless, even if not in Hysteria mode--any hot-blooded male will be motivated to fight.

I stealthily returned to the First Observation Deck....

The power outage on certain sections of the streets below were now brightly lit again.

I have already realised that the power outage was due to Hilda tapping into the power supply to create the large lightning orb.

That woman is really causing problems for everyone in her vicinity.

(However... she hasn't attacked me yet.)

I kept my guard on the Second Observation Deck 100 meters above, but it appears there isn't any light penetrating the cloud layer.

No, there is, but the blurred light appears to be for illumination only.

(That huge move...it should need some time for recovery. Or is she drawing me in closer to her trap?)

Regardless of the situation, I have to press forward.

Since power to the elevator has been restored, I might as well try my luck and use it to get up. But at this point....

The security camera at the entrance to the elevator made a slight

noise as it adjusted its angle.

"....."

Numerous cameras have been installed in the Sky Tree, and I have been avoiding them while making my way here.... But this camera seems to be different from the others, it was a wide angle camera.

In Hysteria mode, I discovered that there was hardly any dust on it.

Probably installed as recently as yesterday or today.

Hilda. Have you been planning to watch my fight with Watson from the very beginning?

--Then, I shall have to charge you a very high fee for watching.

(Every level on this tower has enemies, it's starting to feel like some old game.)

Thinking of this, I resumed taking the elevator to proceed upstairs.

Red flashing beacons installed to warn airplanes from crashing into the tower shone against the metal netting, imprinting square-shaped shadows on my face.

Looking down, the view seems to be an aerial photograph taken by a man-made satellite.

"....."

Upon reaching a '435 meters' marking on a pillar, the elevator stopped. Getting off, I continued upwards on a sloping path constructed with metal bars and plates.

Looking around, it seems that I am still inside the construction building.

Steel bars were exposed from the walls, but at least there was a safety barrier formed by a metal alloy mesh and steel wires.

A strong gust of wind blew past, and it felt like the whole tower was

shaking. No, actually it was really shaking. Construction materials scattered around the place gave off creaking noises.

Squeak. Squeak squeak. Suddenly, a different type of noise made me lift my head up--

"....."

Only to see the whole ceiling filled with bats.

Apparently this place becomes a nest for bats at night.

I'm guessing there are around 50 of them? Although each one is small in size, seeing such a large number hanging upside down together feels really disgusting.

My gaze swept over the the bats, and I prepared to proceed up the path marked with 'Up to 450 meters'--

"--Kinji!"

A seiyuu-like voice came from above my head.

"....."

Looking up, in the shadows of a steel beam--

"Aria...!"

It's Aria.

Her pink twin tails drifting in the wind, she was standing on a metal plate full of small holes.

Good, nothing bad has happened to you.

"Are you feeling all right? You were drugged by Watson...."

"I'm fine. Although I slept enough while I was here.... overall I'm still alright. How about you? The fact you managed to reach here... you fought?"

I quickly ran up the steps, while Aria hurriedly ran down, the

sounds of our footsteps mingling together.

"I didn't know if the one coming up will be you or Watson... I guess this means Watson lost. Watson she... Umm, it can't be helped, this is because the the deal with Hilda has fallen apart. You should have heard about this already?"

Aria looked at me, seemingly knowing more about the details than I do.

".... Yeah. I understand the situation to a certain degree."

"I see."

Aria blinked her eyes, and--

Grabbed my sleeves, dragging me along with some force.

"Come, let's negotiate with Hilda."

"Negotiate? You and I, we.. killed Hilda's father. We're enemies, you think we can communicate with her through dialogue?"

"We can. Hilda is much smarter than Vlad. She is wary of you, Kinji--you did manage to defeat my great grandfather Sherlock Holmes."

"....I guess I'm being overestimated."

"Kinji, only knowing how to fight does not make a real Butei. If we can reach an agreement, even if it doesn't help Deen in any way... We may still be able to work out a truce between Hilda and Baskerville."

Saying this, Aria pulled my hand and ran up the stairs.

Her guns were still visible beneath her skirt--not only both her guns, but Aria was carrying her Kodachi on her back as well.

Didn't Hilda remove her weapons when she came here drugged?

If that is truly the case--maybe we really can negotiate with Hilda.

"....."

Looking closely, Aria was...

Wearing earrings.

And just on one ear, a crudely-made black earring.

It seems familiar.. where have I seen it before?

Well, there's nothing much to say if this is one of Aria's interests, not that it's a good one.

But why does the shape of that thing look like a bat?

It--reminds me of Hilda's wings. This thing has such a hateful design.

Every 100 meters above sea level, the air temperature decreases by 0.6 Degrees Celsius. In addition, it's presently night time.

While the autumn wind on the ground level might feel chilly, but 450 meters up in the sky--the Second Observation Tower was simply freezing like winter.

The Sky Tree reaches up to here, with nothing else above besides the sky.

No stars could be seen in the sky from the end of the stairs.

In place, were thick layers of clouds, moving smoothly along with the strong winds.

Surrounding buildings could no longer be seen, giving me the sensation of being among the clouds.

"....."

Aria and I appraised the Second Observation Deck, which was much smaller than the First Observation Deck.

There were numerous equipment at the sides, with a circular cement ground in the center.

Dimly lit lights were positioned everywhere, randomly illuminating the ground.

There was... no sign of Hilda.

In contrast, there was something which appears to be an altar in the northern corner.

No.. not an altar.

It was something much larger than the usual ones.... a coffin. And a bier.

The shiny black bier was decorated with bright red roses.

The huge roses--are the new species named as 'Aria' by Vlad.

And now, it has been collected in large quantities, almost burying the coffin itself.

Surrounding the coffin, perhaps used in place of Baby's Breath, appears to be some ferns which have extended all the way to where our feet are.

"Hilda... went through the trouble to prepare all these things. I fear she means to have us sleep inside once negotiations are over."

Following Aria's line of sight, I saw 2 mahogany coffins, one large and one small, beside us--

Kinji Tohyama.

Aria Holmes Kanzaki.

Each name was engraved into a metal plate on a coffin.

Perhaps for the sake of transportation, electrical cables were snaking around the 2 coffins.

"..... To have been showered with her love, although I have never wanted it even once."

Feeling a nauseating chill down my back, I kicked out at one of the

coffins.

Immediately, 'Sqeak!'--

Bats flew past my view, and...

"-- The bier, is one's final resting place, even if it is only a few square meters, it is a space that does not allow intrusions of any kind. This is a heartfelt and priceless gift to you from a highborn vampire such as I."

Sha sha... Sha sha sha....

From the luxurious shining black coffin in the northern corner, a weightless-looking umbrella appeared. Even though the coffin lid was still closed.

(Hilda...!)

Guru.. Gururu..

Her face hidden under the spinning umbrella, Hilda--

Appeared with both her legs standing on the sides of the coffin.

Her face showing under the slant illumination of the lights.

(Even though she's an enemy--she's really a beauty.)

I had already knew this during our first encounter, but the realisation deepened in Hysteria mode.

Her wax-like perfect white skin. Exotic yet alluring long red eyelashes. Full red lips. Golden ponytails completely curled at the ends. A beautifully shaped nose...

With such a beautiful person wearing black gothic clothes, it was filled with a decadent, demonic-like charm--befitting one who is in fact, an actual demon.

Layers of wrinkled frills, purely hand-made lace, black silk ribbons. Such extravagant accessories with such simple clothes, worn by

Hilda with such indifference.

"Ho ho, you seem to be entranced by me."

Noticing my line of vision, she lifted her leg upwards in a provocative manner.

Under her mini skirt filled with lace, beside the long stockings, there was a white eyeball tattoo.. It was like we were making eye contact with one another.

Hugging tights with spider-web designs showed off her beautiful leg curves, and on her feet were shiny black enamel high heels--

"Well, it can't be helped, because I am simply too beautiful."

The way I was looking at Hilda, instead of being entranced, I would say--it was on the verge of swallowing her.

Even though I was standing off against her in Hysteria mode, I got a better understanding of her 'style'.

"....."

It was like the female version of a Demon King.

Even the bier underneath her, gave me the impression that it was Hilda's throne.

"If I were to say humans like you are nameless weeds--then vampires are the precious roses residing in a greenhouse. The heavens have given us vastly different markings. Look as much as you like, it's really just like a dog looking at the stars, we are the superior beings that you will never be able to reach--of course, as a member of the other sex, I too, have suffered from the aches and pangs of love. While you yearn for me, you can only see from afar, so I will at least grant you the right to look at me. Look, look, don't move your gaze away..."

As she chuckled, she moved her red nail-polish finger tips to the side of her lips.

--? ....What's the matter?

Just as she said, I found myself unable to move my gaze away.

"That's right, this is it Tohyama. Just like this, like a rooted tombstone that is almost covered completely by algae. Yes... just like this, listen to me, be a good boy, ho ho ho."

.....!

I've been hit...

This is---the Suggestive Arts. Watson mentioned it before, it's a form of hypnotism.

It was used on me the moment we met.

My body... isn't responding....! "Sorry, Kinji."

A seiyuu-like voice as if from an anime. It's Aria. She... took out a metal chain from underneath the coffin marked with her name.

The chain made 'ga, ga' sounds as it was pulled towards me from a hole in the ground.

"......?!"

When Aria bent her waist over, her double guns which were hidden under her skirt could be seen.

Under the influence of Hysteria mode, I noticed something odd about the angle of the holstered guns.

(The center of gravity... seems to be different from usual...?)

---It was as if, the guns were not loaded with bullets at all.

The instant I realised this. 'Clack'.

Aria swiftly wrapped my head with the chain, and proceeded to lock it in place.

(--Aria?)

Even so, I was still unable to make any form of resistance. In my current state, I could see in the field of my vision, 'Pah pah'.....!

"Ho ho ho!"

The curled ends of Hilda's twin tails began exhibiting signs of light electrical discharge.

She was holding in her hands a whip made of metal alloy with the appearance of snake scales--

"Unnn...!"

And as she took in a breath.

--'Crack'!

The sound of electricity discharging--

"Guh!"

I fell onto the ground beside the coffin with my name.

I felt the electric current. Transferring from Hilda's whip to my neck--and the floor as well--through the metal chain.

"Wo ho ho ho ho! Looks like the stuff I transported here specially for this occasion has really been put to good use."

With her fingers pressing on the edge of her mouth, Hilda made a sharp laughter comparable to ultrasound.

The incident at Sotobori Dori is repeating itself again. I gritted my teeth--

..... Why! I looked at Aria and asked with my eyes.

However, she just looked at me with indifference.

"All beautiful roses have thorns--I have heard rumors Tohyama has a weakness for beautiful women, looks like it's true."

Hilda held the whip tightly in both her hands, swinging it and hitting the ground--

She stepped onto the bier, with her high heels making a 'clack' sound.

"--I never wanted to fight with Watson in the first place. That is why, Tohyama, I laid out a plan to have you fight her instead. Even though you're a fool, you do have impressive fighting skills--and as I predicted, you easily disposed of Watson who was holding on to Purified weapons.

Although Watson lied to me as well before our battle, but--

Looks like she was tricked by Hilda as well. We are all a bunch of fools.

So this is one of the way she fights her battles... Carrying out an 'Operation' to deal with us....

"This tower is named the 'Sky Tree'. You are like an aphid crawling up along the tree. Ho ho ho ho ho.... Tohyama, crawl all you want. As for me--being able to fly--"

--Swish--

Bat-like wings sprouted from both sides of Hilda's back in an instant.

The inhumanely large shadow completely covered me as I laid on the ground.

Swish swish--

Fanning both wings several times, generating a down-lifting wind beneath her feet.

The gust of wind scattered the roses beside the bier, revealing....

"...Aria..."

There was actually another Aria lying under the roses.

The Aria covered by flower petals was completely wrapped from head to toe, with a cloth stuffed into her mouth.

With a skillful flick of her hand, Hilda curled the whip around Aria's ankles.

Shuuu!

With both her wings maintaining balance, she pulled back her hand and flung Aria out.

"!"

Being thrown across for nearly 10 meters--

Aria collided with the coffin with her name on it with a bang, dazed for the moment.

"....."

Looking closely, this Aria was wearing Butei High's uniform which has been modified with a sweet-Lolita style.

This uniform should be--

"Hilda--is really wary of Kinji, it's true."

The other Aria said softly as she looked at the Aria lying on the ground.

The Aria who was standing lifted her hand to her jaw...'rustle'...and removed a think mask.

The face under the mask...

"I was still expecting something different to happen... but in the end you're too useless, Kinji."

--Riko!

"Riko.... What, are you doing here...?!"

"....."

Riko, who has switched uniforms with Aria, silently removed her colored contact lens and threw them away.

"--Well done, Riko."

Placing the whip behind her back, Hilda did not refer to Riko as "Fourth" like before.

"Riko, you possess great talent in skill and abilities that even I do not have. I have high regard for this, and hence I have never treated you as a genetic container, but as a formal member of the Dracula family...an existence only second to mine."

Saying this, she walked down the coffin, with her high heels click-clacking as she walked over.

"....."

In contrast, Riko... had a complicated expression on her face.

Is she also under the influence of the 'Suggestive Arts'...?

No, that's doesn't feel right. Riko should still have control over her own actions.

Then why... why are you obeying her commands, Riko...!

"And... you're really cute. Even though you used to despise me, but at the same time you look forward to be just like me right? Your contradicting emotions has given me such heartaches."

Having walked over, Hilda caressed Riko's cheek with her pale white fingers.

Like showing affection for a beloved doll.

"I apologise Riko, my father has treated you like a dog in the past.. but that was never my true intention."

Fingers with bright red nail polish started gently caressing Riko's face.

Over and over... gently.

"I know many things have happened between you and Tohyama, but you should forget all of it. Men are simply too boring. And even if he isn't killed by me, he will ultimately die in the hands of

Grenada one day. So you have no need to feel any guilt."

Hearing this, Riko seemed to be turning her head to look at me, but was immediately held in a tight embrace by Hilda.

"Don't look back anymore. As you well know, this earring--"

Hilda's pale fingertips brushed against the single bat-shaped earring Riko was wearing.

"--is the proof of becoming an official vassal for the Dracula family. If you wish to remove it, you either have to cut off the whole ear, or wait for me to do so when I feel like it, otherwise, the snake venom within will seep into your wound--10 minutes and you will be dead. This is for punishing traitors, to make them pay for their crimes."

Hilda--you witch....!

"You are using this.. to control Riko..."

With my hands finally being able to move slightly, I tried to lift myself up.

It can't be done, even in Hysteria mode.

"Ki-kun."

Freeing herself from Hilda's grip, Riko addressed me.

"Riko has been--thinking about alot of things. After wearing this."

Thinking about alot of things.....?

"Riko has always been in a family of thieves. Not like Ki-kun and everybody else, I live in darkness...the same side as Vlad and Hilda. Unknowingly, I started walking towards the side where Ki-kun is. It's a wrong path that Riko has taken."

Standing in between Hilda and me, Hilda looked down at me.

"Hilda is the Darkness of Grenada, and born a witch. But... she has always been true to herself. Even after being captured and turned

into a vampire by Vlad... she has fought alone, without backing from anyone. She is someone who can understand Riko better than Riko can."

Riko....

"And Hilda has accepted me with her nobility spirit. The night we were making our costumes for the Cosplay Cafeteria...Riko went to meet Hilda, and made an agreement."

Come to think of it, that night...

After completing her costume, someone did call Riko out of the classroom.

So it was then--contact was made with Hilda?

"Even though we were at odds during that time--Riko was surprised. Because Hilda was very polite, and even proposed the terms for Riko to join Grenada. After the fight at Sotobori Dori, Riko talked to Hilda again. Even though I was already wearing the earring, and could only obey her.... but Riko proposed to Hilda to 'never call me Fourth if we are to work together', and Hilda--has never called Riko 'Fourth' ever since."

Standing behind Riko and listening to her speech, Hilda's eyes narrowed, pleased with what she heard.

While she was stroking Riko's head, and was about to say something--

--Uuuuu.

A moan came from my side.

"....Aria....?"

I forciby turned my head which was partially paralysed to look, only to see the cloth stuffed in her mouth--

Being chewed on by her cat-like fangs, and about to be bitten in half.

"---Fwuu ahh!"

Taking in a deep breath, Aria seemed to have finally shaken off the effects of Watson's sedatives.

With her large eyes with finely-defined eyelashes, she lifted her head and glared at Riko.

"--Listen to me, Riko. I... don't intend to blame you, after all anyone will cherish their own life."

Behind me in the shadows, Aria spoke in simple and plain words,

"But, Riko, let me tell you something in my position as a noble. The so-called nobility spirit from Hilda is just a show she has put on for you. Although you seem pretty immersed in it, it's really just like rewarding you with candy so you'll be obedient. She looks down on you, and treats you like a child."

Hilda's eyes--as if being exposed, suddenly became razor sharp.

Aria, don't create any more unnecessary provocations.

Especially when we are unable to move at all.

"Since no one else will point it out, let me do it. Hilda is just using that murderous earring to make you her slave!"

With Aria hitting right in the center of the sore spot, Hilda,

"A human... in front of a superior vampire.. dares to make such statements in a grandiose tone...."

She's... really pissed.

"Vampires are not noble at all! Let me tell you--England has abolished slavery in 1833. You are behind by 150 years! Humans have already long moved on from slavery!"

Hey, Aria.

Haven't you been treating me as a slave ever since we met?

"--And you, Riko!"

Baring fangs comparable to a vampire at Riko.

She leapt up from behind me despite being constricted.

"Since you don't believe in Kinji, and laid a trap for him--then as Kinji's partner, I have a duty to fight you! Prepare yourself!"

And as Aria was jumping up and down like a fish--

Shuu..

(This, this person...!)

She seems to be escaping from her chains.

Oh yes, I remember now.

Back in September, just like when we were tied up in the Shinkansen, Aria was very skilled in getting out of her bonds.

--It follows the principle of pulling a Green Foxtail which has been rolled into a ball from someone's hands.

Noticing this, I immediately used my body to block Hilda's view.

"I'm going to punish you, Riko. Because you are standing on Hilda's side now, nah!"

Shuuu!

Escaping from her chains, Aria immediately pulled out Watson's Holy Cross Sword from my back.

"--!"

Upon seeing the sword, Hilda seemed to reach for the whip on her waist.

However, there's simply no time for her to retaliate.

"Ya!"

Wearing Riko's modified uniform, Aria leapt over me to attack Hilda, the ribbons on her chest fluttering in the wind.

Just when the Holy Cross Sword in her small hand was stabbing towards Hilda like a comet--

Whoosh.

Using both her wings and feet to push herself, Hilda slid backwards at the very last moment.

She dodged, evading Aria's attack completely.

Able to escape the seemingly unavoidable strike in an instant, Hilda is indeed able to recover instantaneously.

"Bah, that is truly a bothersome thing you have there."

Seeing Aria pull back the sword, Hilda flicked her wrist and attacked with the whip.

Just as if looked like Aria and Hilda were locked in a stalemate--

"--!"

Paaa!

The whip from Hilda's hand made contact with the silver sword in Aria's hand.

"Kyaaa!"

High tension electrical current suddenly passed among the three parties, and Aria gave out a short cry.

Even though she didn't loosen her grip, but to the current Aria--

"Lowly human--know your place!"

Hilda successfully struck at the sword, causing it to fly in mid-air--

The train of her skirt flying in the wind, Hilda leapt up and kicked out with her heels.

"--ahhh!"

Backing down near to where I am, Aria seemed to be nearly paralysed by the electrocution.

Losing her strength, she fell into a cross-legged sitting position in front of the coffin, no longer able to move.

"How dare you use such filthy things against me....!"

Using the whip to curl around the silver sword, Hilda then pulled her whip hand back over her head.

Following that--like a catapult from the Middle Ages, she made a big arc with her hands, flinging the sword far away.

I could only look on as the sword flew in a straight path out of the observation deck--

Looks like it's true, Hilda really despises that sword.

But, the trump card is no longer in our hands now.

Plus Aria, the only one with experience fighting Choutei is down for the count.

Riko has joined the enemy, and will only watch from the sidelines.

As for the me in Hysteria mode, I have been in this sorry state from the very beginning.

(.....Godammnit....)

3 minutes.. No, just give me 2 more minutes. Is there no way to buy time?

Just 2 more minutes and I can move my hands.

If I can move my hands... there's still a chance...!

"Such rats trying to go against the Night Hunter of Grenada.. it makes me sick. This joke has gone on far enough."

--chi chi, chi chi chi chi...

A strange sound of something being started made me raise my head, only to see Hilda standing a short distance away....

"--Aira, I have decided to bring forward my operation for you."

She lifted a small chainsaw hidden among the ferns.

Following which, she activated it. The chainsaw started making crunching noises as Hilda slowly closed in.

This is like a bad scene from a horror movie...!

"Hey, hey! Don't come over! What operation are you talking about!"

"Why, it's to saw Aria's chest open in order to remove her heart. The human rib-cage can be surprisingly sturdy."

Facing me as I was shouting, a frozen smile appeared on Hilda's pale face.

Hilda reached the side of Aria, and 'shaaaa'--

Ripped apart the blouse of her sailor uniform in one motion.

"All right, look closely now Aria, the Hidan in your heart, I'm going to....."

Unable to make a sound because she was paralysed from the electric shock, Aria's chest and underwear were exposed.

Having her bra with the poker pattern fully exposed, Aria--

Even though she could not speak, her face blushed red in an instant.

And using all her body strength shifted her head to the side as a sign of resistance.

But Hilda mercilessly pressed on to Aria's flat chest--

"Be at ease. I do fancy your appearance somewhat, and will not damage any other areas besides your chest, so as to leave your

whole corpse for the coffin. So you should hand over your body to me without worries...."

Fu. Fu. Hilda started panting excitedly--

Then slowly, slowly, inched the electric saw nearer and nearer to Aria's chest.

Her eyes staring at the fearful expression showing on Aria's face.

That Hilda...she's enjoying herself from human fear...!

"Stop, Stop...!"

My incessant shouting were simply an entertaining sideshow for Hilda.

Ho... She bared her fangs, unable to conceal her joy.

"Fantastic.. tonight is simply fantastic. Just thinking back of the exhilaration I am experiencing now, I'm afraid even after a year from now I will still be happy beyond measure. All right, Aria--now scream, please scream out loud, it will be like cute noises from a nightingale... ho ho ho, wo ho ho ho ho!"

The blade of the saw finally made contact with Aria's underwear--

'Sssss', scattering fibres of clothing.

"--!"

Aria's body jerked in response. Seeing this, 'Ahhh', Hilda gave out a coy sigh.

With her face showing her to be fully immersed in sadistic pleasure, she tightened her body.

"Excellent... that's very good Aria, that was simply incomparable.... Yes, that expression. More, show me more....!"

Probably over-indulging on her feelings, Hilda's hands started trembling from the excitement--

"Just a little, a little bit more, yes, more, show me! Ahhhhh.... Yes! Yes!"

'Sss', 'Sssssss'----!

She ran the tip of the electric saw several times over Aria's underwear.

".....Stop....I....hate...."

Finally able to speak softly, Aria was still unable to resist at all.

Hearing her voice, Hilda's breathing became more intense.

"How is it? Are you terrified? You're terrified aren't you? Then say it out! Say it, quickly!"

Speaking like a sadistic maniac, Hilda continued shifting the electric saw relentlessly.

Sssssss--!

Sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly.

"How is it Aria?! You should say something! Ho ho, ho ho ho ho!"

--Ssss, ssss--sssssssss--

Ravaged to no end, the underwear was now worn to a thread--once it falls off...

Hilda will most certainly harm the layer of skin below. Over. And over.

Similarly after that, the tissues, and even the bone....!

(Shit....move...!)

Come on hands, move...!

If I can move my hand, I can try to.... stop that... saw....!

But, it won't move. There's still 1 minute to go... it can't be done

still, I can't move my hands at all.

"Hilda, is this really alright."

Suddenly at this moment, Riko--

In a manner vastly different from the usual, started speaking in the tones she used when she was the "Butei Killer".

"Aria is a rare host of the Hidan. If we kill her, progress on "The Study in Scarlet" will become exceedingly difficult."

Above my head, Riko reached out her hand and grabbed the handle of the electric saw.

Her... hand was trembling slightly.

"....."

As if in a trance, Hilda raised the corner of her eyes.

Looking like a teenage girl whose dessert was taken away.

"You--insolent girl!"

Pah!

A golden bolt of electricity flashed from Hilda's hand.

"--Guuuuh!"

Riko fell forward. And Hilda--

Stepped onto Riko's back with the thin and sharp stiletto of her heels.

Then, a crashing sound--

With movements like a lunatic, she threw her saw onto the ground.

"Riko! Didn't you.... see and understand what was going on? I was having the time of my life! Painstakingly... working towards it painstakingly, I almost could have gotten my high--but thanks to

you, everything is ruined!"

Grinding her gritted teeth, Hilda yelled out in an indignant, even tearful manner.

It appears that... having someone interrupt her while she was torturing her prey is one of the unhappiest things that can happen to Hilda.

--What the hell is she. Truly a real sadist. It's incomprehensible.

"A..Aria is still of some value! Don't kill her...!"

Riko--continued saying.

It seems that the voltage Hilda used was much lower than when she was dealing with me and Aria.

But, looking at Hilda's attitude now... it doesn't look like she stayed her hand on purpose.

Observing this with my own eyes in Hysteria mode, I discovered something was amiss--

At this time, my hands were able to move slightly.

Another 30 seconds....!

"You actually said 'Don't kill Aria'.....? Did you not swear loyalty to me? I see, so that's how it is, you intend to betray me again?"

Creak....!

Applying force on her toes, Hilda ravaged Riko's back with the stilettos of her heels.

".....!"

Riko was unable to free herself.

But seeing how she was able to raise her head due to the pain, it seems that she wasn't completely immobilised.

Completely uncharacteristic of Riko, with fear showing on her face, she silently took in Hilda's rage.

Riko--

When she curled up on my bed that night, simply hearing Hilda's name frightened her.

Although it looks as if she was trying to convince Hilda just now, but in actual fact... she was probably terrified. She's terrified of Hilda.

Jittery, unable to disobey. Really.

"Riko, I intended to have you tested tonight. To see if you are able to watch me kill Aria and Tohyama... but, you failed. Does this mean you wish to return to Baskerville? Huh? Huhhhh?"

Creak... Creak...!

"Ahhhh... Guuuuh!"

Riko's voice was trembling due to pain and fear.....

"Riko, you are indeed unfit to become my servant. You can only be a pet. You shall stay in my room as a toy for the rest of your life, I'll let you wear a collar and treat you with affection. So as to say, the next time you disobey me--I'll use the earring and kill you!"

Hilda who was ravaging Riko's back with her heels,

Bang!

Stepped her heels onto an empty spot near Riko's head.

"--Riko, beg for my forgiveness. Hmmmm, apologising is of no use now. You'll have to kiss my shoe while swearing your undying loyalty to me. You can only live on as my property."

"Uuu.... Uuuuuuuu..."

Her hands, in a posture seemingly to support and hold something,

touched the heels in front of her eyes.

With her face sticking on the concrete floor.

Drip. Drip. The sound of water rang out.

Those--Riko's tears...

"..........!"

Now--

I can finally move my right hand, and grab the drug in my pocket.

Then, 'Phishhh'--

I plunged the needle into my left hand.

Just as the trembling Riko was about to place her lips onto Hilda's shoe--

"Butei Charter No. 8."

As I spoke, I gathered the collective consciousness of every part of my body.

The beating of my heart, the circulation of my blood, all returning to normal as the effects of the drug spread.

"The mission must be resolved completely."

The deep sound of my voice made Hilda turn her head.

Her large eyes brimming with tears, Riko turned her head as well to look at me.

"Riko, when did it all start--the moment you started to place your trust in me? It was the moment you told me 'Save me'."

Even though I was aware of the way I was talking, but--

My Hysteria mode seems to be skewed towards Normal mode now.

Is it because the feeling of 'Aria is being taken away by another man' has faded?

From the blood flow in my body, I would estimate--70% Normal mode, 30% Berserker mode--or thereabout.

Even though Hilda is female, but I should be able to fight her using the momentum of Berserker mode. I'll just do it!

"Tonight, let me finish the 'hidden part' of the mission Riko has requested of me."

Looking at me still lying on the ground, Hilda laughingly mocked at me,

"Ho ho ho--what are you planning to do, Tohyama? Use your body which can only sprawl on the floor like a dying earthworm?"

For your first question, I will answer with words. As for the second question, I shall refute it with action."

"....?"

"I will, rescue Riko."

Finished with my line, and still pretending to be unable to move--

Swish!

I pushed myself up, and vaulted onto my feet.

And immediately rushed towards Hilda with my posture lowered.

"--!"

Not believing that I was able to move, and that I would really use my actions to refute her statement, Hilda just stood there and stared.

Using the opportunity, I rescued Riko, carrying her in my arms, princess-style.

(--It'll be troublesome if I get electrocuted again.)

Thinking about this, I considered where the high tension cables were located on the ground and the safety distance I have to keep--

I pulled away a distance of 6 meters away from Hilda.

"....."

In my arms, Riko... was curled up and trembling like a child freezing in cold weather.

Her fear of Hilda had been deeply imprinted into her heart ever since she was a child, even now it was still binding Riko.

What kind of cruel treatments did she suffer as a child.....

From the looks of it, it's probably much worse than I can ever imagine.

On the other hand, as I have quickly verified... Although Aria is still unable to cover herself with her underwear in pieces, and unable to speak, but--

"RIKO. PRIORITY. SAVE."

She sent me the message to using the method of eye-blinking communication.

You really are a kind-hearted child, Aria.

You should just have a good rest now.

--Leave the rest to me.

"What is with this 'rescue Riko'? Tohyama, you really are a pushover. Riko is the wicked girl who set the trap to lure you into coming here not too long ago, remember?"

Swish.

Opening up her bat wings, she flapped her wings and lifted her feet up from the ground.

Flying to a height of nearly 1 meter, she landed on the coffin with my name.

"Riko betrayed me when pleaded with me to spare Aria's life. And to think not too long ago, she wore the earring and swore loyalty to me. Before that, she was a member of Team Baskerville. And again before that, she was in E.U. Even earlier than that, a dog that my father kept--she has been traversing between night and day so many times it's simply frightening, what an unsightly woman."

Hearing what Hilda said, a trembling Riko shut her eyes tightly....

"It's true, Kinji..... I am a traitor... I betrayed you because I didn't want to die...."

Riko started quivering and sobbing while in my arms.

The earring on her ear gleaming for an instant.

"Riko, you have to be re-educated, because such inconsistency and indecisiveness from you is simply hideous--"

Using the coffin as a stepping stone--

Swish!

Opening her wings up even more than just now, she flew up 3 meters, above the lights of the observation deck.

".....!"

Her jumping ability left me gawking.

"--The world, turns with the night as it's center--!"

Moving with the wind, Hilda's gliding form cast a shadow on our heads.

She did not flap her wings at all while up in the air.

Judging from the shape, her wings seems to maintain flight in a different manner from birds.

She could rise up 2~3 meters in the air, and cut across the sky like a snowmobile.

Her mobility far exceeds that of humans. What a tough opponent.

Hilda spread her wings like an airplane, stagnating in the air for a brief moment before starting to reduce her speed... Swish.

With her mini skirt pressed down, the train of her extravagant skirt fluttering upwards--

She landed on the large black coffin filled with flowers.

"The Dracula clan is the dark nobility of Grenada. Riko--unlike you, our hearts have never wavered, nor have we turned our backs on darkness. We, are never confused."

Saying this, Hilda covered her mouth with a fan made of black ostrich feathers.

"This is the dogma of our strength, which is why our bloodline is able to obtain the greatest power, and stand at the very top of all living things. Power, is determined by the sequence of all living things. The weak must obey the strong. This is the truth of life."

Clack. Clack.

The sounds of Hilda's heels could be clearly heard as she walked back and forth on the bier.

"Humans are not spared from this reality as well. The weak can only suppress their will, and live under the bindings of the strong. Disobedience will only mean certain death. Riko, your earring is the symbol of such reality."

Like a lecturer on a stage, Hilda continued speaking,

"Vampires are realistic. We do not spout idealistic remarks like 'No bullying of the weak' like humans. That's right. It is too idealistic even for humans. Human societies do not show pity to the weak as well. They are either alienated or simply left to die slowly. Riko, that is why it is only natural for you to obey me. In this city there are millions of people obeying another person in order to survive--they are accepting the very same reality."

Hilda pointed at the commotion under her feet with her fan.

I glanced down, only to see the lights below--

Were being extinguished one by one....

"Accept reality--this will mean how you have the matured as a living thing. So Riko, there is nothing for you to cry about. If you

are able to let go of your confusion and watch Tohyama and Aria die, you will have grown as an adult. Obeying the strong, accepting the truth--this is part of being an adult. So there's is no need for your tears any more."

Covering her face with both hands, Riko was still sobbing.

And looking at her from close distance--

I could no longer hold back, and chuckled at Lady Dracula who had been talking non-stop.

"....Ha.... 'Power is everything'? This is just like some villain from an old shounen manga. Hilda, you are unable to recognise the strength of people, as a noble you are simply being disrespectful. You actually treat Riko as a weak child."

"What did you say....?"

Swish--Hilda's head turned back to look at me. In a laughing tone, I said,

"I'm afraid you have only encountered weak people. As for me, be it good or bad--I have met many people who are really strong. Riko is one of them."

".....Kinji.....?"

Riko opened a little space between her fingers, showing her teary eyes.

"Hilda, it's just like you said--humans often become lost. However, we live with this confusion, and look out for one another while we choose the correct path to take. It is because of this confusion, that we are called humans. Sometimes this confusion is worth laughing at. Honestly speaking, Riko is an idiot with directions and tone deaf... this is why I, will become her map."

Like an elder brother looking at his sister, I looked at Riko in my arms with warm and gentle eyes.

Looking directly into Riko's pupils, I asked with sincerity,

"Riko, you--have always been shackled by Vlad and Hilda. It must have been a cruel, harsh and stubborn binding, right?"

"....."

Riko's wet eyes-- looking back at me.

"Riko, is it okay to continue on like this? Is it fine to remain shackled like this?"

Facing my direct question, Riko--

"....No...no more. I, I've had enough..."

Tears started flowing from her big round eyes once again.

Uncontrollably, she cried without pause.

"....I want, I want to be free...!"

".....Good. Nicely said."

Turning 180 degrees, I placed Riko down carefully.

"Listening to your words is enough. It has already given me a reason to fight."

Following which, I went down on one knee, and gently wiped the tears off her face.

"I will defeat her, and remove this hateful earring for you--"

I stood up once again, turning my head in Hilda's direction.....

"--with the best of my abilities."

Although it may be a little too late, I finally declared war against Hilda.

"Lady Hilda Dracula. You are guilty of harming, imprisoning and kidnapping a minor, I will now arrest you."

As I stared at Hilda--

Swish. She closed her fans, looking pleased as she looked at me.

"Tohyama--nice eyes. You're a completely different person from when I last attacked that vehicle, it's pretty attractive. If it's the you now, I don't mind giving you an accessory for your personal use."

"Being unable to accept a gift from a beautiful lady, I am really sorry--but, although I must decline becoming exclusively yours, but if it's the other way round, you can consider it after our fight. After all, I seemed to be known as a lady killer."

"The other way round...?"

Hilda looked as if she was considering something....

Following which, her porcelain white skin became tinged slightly red.

Maybe she was thinking of going out on a date and holding hands with me or something.

Just when she was furiously thinking of something to say, I intentionally smiled questioningly at her--momentarily causing her to be unable to speak, and blushing angrily in embarrassment.

Ha.... It seems that there isn't much difference in treating her as one would treat a normal girl.

Especially since she's a very self-centred girl.

From her reaction, it seems she has very little experience, no, she has absolutely no experience in interacting with men.

Well her father is the fearsome Vlad after all. I seriously doubt there were any chances of knowing any guys.

"Ah.... Ri, Riko!"

In a state of panic, Hilda shifted her conversation away from me to Riko--

"I am now, going to kill Tohyama immediately! Watch closely and

learn!" You should not be choosing a path based on some fictional fantasy like freedom, but a path of being shackled to reality!"

Slowly recovering her initial momentum, 'pa'... 'pa'... small balls of light started appearing around her.

"'Lightning Orb'--I only used about 80% strength when I dealt with Watson. But, Tohyama, as for you, I shall show you the power of 100%. No, for the crime of making fun of me, I shall let you have a taste of 120%....!"

A golden lightning orb the size of a Ping Pong ball started forming in front of Hilda's chest.

Then its size slowly increased to that of a baseball--then a volleyball--its size was increasing with each passing second.

--It's coming--

Making use of the city's power grid, this is her sure-kill technique.

It's the very same ball of lightning that hit Watson.

(.....The silver bullets.....)

I have no weapon on my waist now, I left my Desert Eagle on the First Obeservation Deck after Watson threw the magazine away. Just the Beretta holstered at the side of my body.

And this Beretta, will be the trump card in this fight with Hilda--

Loaded within were Purified Silver Bullets that Watson has given me.

Since Hilda seemed to really despise the silver sword, the silver bullets should have the same effect.

However, in order to shoot--the timing is of utmost importance.

Because if she notices the gun, she will certainly go for it in a heartbeat.

And if it turns into close-quarter combat, I will have to constantly guard against her electric shocks, placing me in a very disadvantageous position.

So now I can only maintain a distance, and find an opportunity to open fire at Hilda.

--Thinking like this, I hid the silver bullets.

"Now.... 100%....! Good, it's almost done...!"

Looking at the large ball of light which was now taller than Hilda, I discovered a decisive gap in Hilda's defense--

Thanks to my observation eye powers while in Hysteria mode.

The very instant she launches an attack using electricity, she becomes exhausted.

And just for that very moment, she will be defenseless.

So--it will be possible to inflict serious wounds on her if I shoot a split second before she releases the lightning orb.

Plus my shooting is blindingly fast--

Because from imitating Nii-san, I have mastered the 'Invisible Bullet'...!

"......!"

Producing crackling sounds, the lightning orb is now more than 2 meters in diameter--

It is at least one times, no, two times larger than the one that hit Watson.

Although I don't really understand the physical make-up of electric particles, but the density--seems to be very high for this thing.

While my clothes may be bullet-proof, it offers no protection against electricity. If I get hit I will definitely die.

But I have no fear. Because I will take Hilda out before it hits me.

Hence, like an attempt to suppress any remaining traces of fear within me--I start to make tiny movements with my fingers.

Invisible Bullet. To draw the gun in a blinding flash like drawing a sword. This is in preparation to act.

(Ok, I'm ready for it at any time now--)

The time-span when Hilda will be fully exhausted is only 0.5 seconds.

That will be more that enough.

Invisible Bullet, just needs only 1 shot to well and truly hit the opponent.

Nothing else in this world can be compared to Hysteria mode. I will let Hilda personally experience that.

In order not to miss the moment, I stared fixatedly at Hilda's beautiful face.

"Tohyama. For a weakling who cannot choose between the darkness and the light, and a fool who mouths off fantasies, I'll have you die in your fantasy. Fantasies are but dreams, and dreams cannot turn into reality, it is a most foolish way of thinking. Humans like you whom are incapable of living in darkness--are nothing more than sinful creatures who think of darkness as a mere fantasy, and taint the beauty of the night--"

Fuuuh. Taking in a deep breath, Hilda--

Forcefully released the golden lightning orb--

Now!

(--Invisible Bullet--!)

.....?!

"--.....?!"

What--what is happening?

Hands... I can't move my hands...!

The paralysis from the previous electric shock has most certainly been removed.

"--You really are a man who doesn't learn, Tohyama."

Posing as if she was about to release the lightning orb, Hilda--suddenly smiled--

She spun the lightning orb in her hands, and move it above her head.

"Silver bullets emanating the smell of cheap perfume, you think I haven't noticed? You kept your eyes on me while you were preparing to shoot. So--I used the Suggestive Arts on you."

.....I'm finished.....!

Searching for a defensive gap before the opponent strikes, looks like she has turned the tables on me using the same tactic.

And with regard to trickery, this bat-girl is already a pro from the start.

.....'Pah', 'Pah pah'... the crackling of electricity is getting louder...!

"Like how science is moving forward, so too is magic. If I were to solely rely on my own body, it's simply a matter of time before I run out of energy. So I developed a method of exploiting energy obtained from the outside. Just like how a witch in the desert obtain power from the stars in the sky, I--make use of the electricity produced by humans. If based on the catergorisation method being used in the recent years, I can be considered among one of those able to use a second ability. The only difference, is that I have reached a level no humans can hope to match.... Ok, it's now at 120%.... Ahhhh, it's spoilt. Looks like it's still a bit difficult to manipulate."

Saying this, Hilda began rebuilding the lightning orb. Even the skin on her body began producing short crackling sounds due to electricity.

Her golden pupils, smiling--stared at me.

(It's coming....!)

Laughing and baring her fangs, Hilda--

"Tohyama, you have a very nice expression on your face now. It's simply divine....."

Finally, she's beginning to use her strength. But at this time,

Swish--

"--?"

Drifting along with the wind--

Reflecting the light from the lightning orb, something like a ball of glass rose up from the ground.

From my toes, it jumped to the side of the coffin Hilda was standing on.

Flying along with the wind, is that.... a soap bubble?

No, that's not it.

Last month, I saw it on the Shinkansen--the Explosive Bubble--a vapor explosive.....!

--BOOM!!!--

The sound from the explosion rocked the entire Second Observation Deck. The roses and ferns which decorated the bier were reduced to scattered petals dancing in the sky.

"--?!"

Wearing her heels, Hilda almost lost her balance.

'Pa pa', 'Pa'! This time the sound of electricity came from the side of the coffin--the thick electric cable hidden below the Japanese Creepers had been broken.

And as my eyes were registering this scene, the lightning orb above Hilda's head--

--Whoosh--

Like an electric ball with its power cut, vanished without a trace.

Managing to remain standing on the coffin after some effort, Hilda bared her fangs--

"Fourth.....!"

She called out the name.

Turning my head back, beside me...

Standing there, holding on tightly to a tiny perfume bottle with her trembling fingers, was Riko.

2nd Ammo: Magnificient Riko - Fii Bucuros Riko-

"Ki-kun, back down～"

Stepping forward, Riko threw away a one-time use bottle roughly the size of a pill.

After shouting my name, she gradually stopped her shaking.

Then, she started clapping her hands loudly and yelling.

"Ah, that's right! Riko forgot! She actually forgot! Ki-kun and Aria are both Riko's prey! But, who's that girl? How could she be so ignorant and attempt to start a NTR path[3] on her own! Hohohoho～!"

Taking random little steps, Riko spun around in a circle.

Now she's behaving just like her usual self, block-headed but brimming with the will to fight.

Although looking at her now, it seems a bit like she's encouraging herself.

"--That coffin is a transformer right?"

Coming to a stop with her feet smacking down, Riko's eyes were serene as she faced Hilda.

From what I can tell... Her expression seems to indicate she has made a important decision about something.

"You can use electricity. However, this ability is copied from the genes of the African Knifefish. It's unable to discharge large amounts of electricity for long periods of time, at most--once or twice each time, then it will need some time to rest."

"Fourth... How did you know..."

"What's there to be surprised about? You can simply search the net for this basic knowledge--"

Riko smiled brazenly at Hilda, who was furrowing her eyebrows.

"This is why you normally restrain yourself from releasing electricity...and tap it from external sources instead. However, since the voltage of the electrical supply from external sources are very low, and your body can only process high voltage electricity, you'll need a large transformer."

(....So that's how it is....)

Just like how electronic products from other countries cannot directly use Japan's electrical power due to incompatible voltage ratings, and require a suitable transformer.

And Hilda is no exception.

That huge coffin, is a transformer used by Hilda to convert the city's electrical power supply for her attacks.

Now, with the loss of that coffin, she's...

"Hilda, there's no longer any electrical power supply you can use. Your body can no longer discharge electricity as well, because you have already used your own electricity on Aria and me. This also means that you have lost your ability to manipulate atoms, and you're no longer capable of converting yourself into a shadow to move freely around."

Pulling on Aria's arms, who is still unable to move, Riko dragged her away from the mahogany coffin.

Then she patted on her ears, and took out another mini-sized perfume bottle.

Pressing on the nozzle--

Small bubbles floated in between my coffin and Aria's coffin, and

boom. The explosion blew apart the cables connecting the two coffins.

Sparks could be seen from arcing the severed cables, creating snapping sounds.

"As expected, this is a battery bank. Hilda, after hearing what I said, you gave a 'I still have an ace up my sleeve' look at this coffin. You should know better--Riko is a thief whose expertise is finding what others want to hide."

"I was too careless. To think... you still have more of such explosives with you..."

Baring her fangs, Hilda gritted her teeth.

Riko threw away the empty explosives bottle, and continued talking.

"As everyone knows, 'The Butei Killer uses bombs'."

These were the exact words she said to me on when she hijacked the ANA600--

Riko lifted her skirt up slightly, and made a curtsey at Hilda after displaying her superiority.

(...Riko...)

--Crack--

A bright red flower seemed to have bloomed on Riko's right ear--

That's fresh blood.

The earring, which Hilda mentioned "will explode on my command", has cracked.

Even though there were no injuries to other parts of the body besides the ear--I'm afraid that the snake venom has entered her body through the wound.

A venom with enough poison to kill ten people...!

"....."

Riko remained in her slightly bowing position, the pain on her ear causing her to eyelids to twitch lightly.

Her cute face, still tranquil as though nothing had happened.

"Ki-kun, we'll have to say goodbye now. If I had known, the two of us should have had a farewell dinner."

Riko's strong voice appeared to be abnormally serene.

"Although there is only 10 minutes, but Riko has escaped from the control of those people and obtained her freedom. All thanks to Ki-kun's encouragement, Riko can go back to becoming the real Riko. So, even if it's only for 10 minutes... Ki-kun can see the real Riko, and that's enough."

Before she finished her sentence...

Large rain drops started falling from the gloomy sky.

Patter, patter... Riko shook her head, as if trying to cut off the falling rain drops, drawing the swords on her back.

Aria's twin Kodachi, which she took when disguising herself as Aria.

"Hilda, I'm now going to finish something I've always wanted to do... I'm taking my revenge on you!"

With blood still flowing on her right ear--

Riko loosened her hair down, like the Medusa from Greek mythology.

"Fine by me, there's no harm in fighting you. For someone of your calibre, you're no match for me even if I'm unable to use electricity. You should feel honoured, because you're the first human to have fought twice with members of the Dracula family in a single lifetime."

As if to counter Riko's hair, Hilda unfolded both her wings, and brought 1 leg forward.

Using her toes, she hooked up--a golden trident.

With three prongs as its front, the trident boasts a higher kill-rate than a normal spear.

"However, Fourth, have you forgotten? Vampires have four Demon Entrails which can heal any wound in an instant, and the location of the Demon Entrails differ for each vampire--you don't know where mine are, and the ones you do know, are only the two on my leg?"

"Riko...."

Still unable to move due to the influence of the Suggestive Arts, I twisted my head to look--

Only to see Riko pulling the bolt of a gun, saying.

"Don't worry, Riko still has Ki-kun."

Raising my Beretta, she kissed it.

Looks like she stole it from me even before she got up on her feet.

"Purified Silver Bullets--you won't be able to heal from wounds caused by these right, Hilda?"

".... It just won't be instantaneous, and there's nothing to fear as long as it doesn't hit. Come, enemies of my father--pray for yourselves. Tonight, the three of you will die."

Hilda got down from the coffin, raising the trident--

Riko drew the Saxon hunting knife from my back, and displayed the twin kodachi in her hair, as well as the gun and knife in her hands.

--Double Knife Double Gun Riko--

Although the version in front of me is slightly different, but that

form which caused untold suffering even for Aria gloomily surfaced in my mind.

"Tonight only two people will die--and that includes you!"

Riko suppressed the pain from the poison, and roared as she charged forward.

At lightning speed, she got close to Hilda, swinging the twin Kodachi at her opponent using her hair--

Clang clang!

Hilda blocked the attack using her trident.

Following that, Riko started to spin her Kodachi like a windmill, an action physically impossible for human arms, hoping to use the technique to disarm Hilda of her trident.

Clang!

Also using a move which humans are unable to perform--Hilda used her wings to launch the trident into the air.

Her corset now almost twisted to the opposite direction, bang!

Just as one of Hilda feet (which was in heels) touched the ground--

"Hilda! You--have survived till now relying on your Demon Entrails!"

Clang!

The Beretta in Riko's hand spat fire, a Purifed Silver Bullet flying towards Hilda's right wing--hitting the base of the wing.

With a loud bang, the wing membrane which was hit exhibited an unusually large, spreading wound.

It was like being splashed with acid.

"Guh...!"

Hilda started to moan. her wounds not healing instantly like Vlad.

"Just because you think nothing of being wounded, your movements are too slow! You're too conceited!"

In the midst of Riko bellowing, Hilda managed to stablilise her body--

"You.. Fourth! You are nothing but my pet...! How dare you speak such nonsense!"

Aiming for Riko's neck this time, Hilda swung her trident trident across horizontally...

"Ahhaha!"

Laughing, Riko spread open her legs back and forth, gracefully lowering her body and dodging the trident.

Following that, spinning both her legs like a compass, whirling closer and closer to Hilda.

This--taught to her by Koko, feet techniques from Chinese Kenpo.

"--Hilda! Your skills at close combat sucks!"

Edging closer and constraining Hilda with the twin Kodachi, and at the same time--

Having switched my Beretta to 3-round burst mode, continued firing at her right wing.

The bullets seems to have caused serious wounds to the muscles, the battle-scarred right wing started to--hang downwards limply.

Seeing this, Riko swung the Saxon hunting knife--

The severed right wing hanging in mid-air--

".....!"

Left with only one wing, Hilda retreated backwards unwillingly.

But the silver bullets from the Beretta showed her no mercy, and upon hearing the impact sounds, the bullets have already pierced her left wing.

"Ahhaha! Hilda! Hilda! What's the matter with you!?"

Engaging in Aru＝Kata has slowly forced Hilda into a dead end.

Riko, using Aria's twin Kodachi, my gun and knife, was using all the skills she has learnt in E.U. and Butei High.

Yes--this was a battle which Riko has staked her own life on.

On one side was the "Butei Killer" who was holding nothing back, and on the other side was Hilda who was slowly running out of space to retreat--

Riko again swung the Saxon hunting knife out in front of her.

The blade following the trajectory of the bullets, cutting off Hilda's left wing.

Showing no hesitation in sacrificing her remaining wing--

Hilda stabbed out viciously with the trident, successfully snatching the Saxon hunting knife out of Riko's hand.

"....You...filthy rat!"

Hilda flung the hunting knife to a corner of the Second Observation Deck, however--

"Rat? Are you referring to yourself? A wing-less bat, aiyaya, how unimaginable, it's the same as a rat! Ah haha!"

Not caring about the fact she was now left holding the twin Kodachi and a gun, Riko resumed her attack against Hilda who has lost her wings.

Her Japanese sword tearing Hilda's skirt--stab! The tip of the blade entering the flank of Hilda.

"Kuh....!"

Something like red mist appeared from the wound, quickly healing it, but....

Fearing the bullets from the Beretta, Hilda started using the trident to defend against Riko's attack.

Riko doesn't have much bullets left--if my guess is correct, there is still 1 round left--she was actively using the Kodachi now.

"Ah hahahaha! Come on Hilda! Trample on me and kick me! Come on, it'll just be like old times!"

She was searching whether there was any Eyeball tattoos on the skin where the clothes had been torn off, or where the wounds healed more slowly than usual--

Riko was looking for the positions of the Demon Entrails.

"S... stop.. Stop it... Stop!"

"Back then! I begged you as well! But you continued to kick me viciously like you didn't hear anything!"

Riko continued to stubbornly use the twin Kodachi, slicing at Hilda who was finally losing her grip on the trident.

Hilda curled into a ball, waving in the air desperately both hands with bright red fingernails, but still unable the fate of having her hands stabbed.

I understand, there's no other way to find the positions of the Demon Entrails...

But Riko's method of attacking, was cruel to the point it was unbearable to watch on.

And she was laughing.

(....Battle-crazed...)

--The thought came to me, having not seen Riko's true nature for some time.

Riko--she may seem easy-going, but in actual fact she is a young girl with an extremely large amount of pride.

Viewing her figure from behind, it seems to me that she harbours an insane vengeance towards enemies who have wounded her pride.

"....In--insolent girl! Get lost!"

With injuries from stab wounds all all over her body, there was barely any clothes on Hilda except her underwear--

Squeezing out her last remaining strength--'zzzz'--'zzzz'....

She discharged electricity from her body, but it was so much weaker than before.

"--whoa."

Riko jumped back a step--and continued backing to our side.

The rain was getting heavier, the raindrops slowing washing Hilda's blood off Riko's blades.

"....Fourth... I'm absolutely not going to let you off..."

Cursing Riko, Hilda hugged her own body tightly and stared viciously at her.

That electricity--she's probably using her own life energy as a price to release it.

Although the other party can no longer release lightning orbs, but now we can't get near her as well.

Even though the wounds on Hilda's body were slowly healing, but it looks like healing will need more time when electricity is being released at the same time--all of a sudden, there was no activity from Hilda, who was holding the trident in her embrace.

Perhaps she has only herself to blame for messing around with Aria's underwear earlier... Now her retribution has come, Hilda's exquisite underwear and tight pants has turned into pieces of cloth, a stocking suspender on one side has been severed, hanging loosely at the side of her leg.

From the looks of it...Although Hilda's clothes are electricity-proof and fire-proof, it's not the cut-proof nor bullet-proof.

"Ummm.. Kuh kuh..."

Hilda was trying very hard to meld herself with the shadows on the ground--perhaps to hide, but was ultimately unsuccessful.

This is great, seeing that this is a golden opportunity where she did not have enough electrical power, we have to act now if we want to defeat her...!

"The eyeball tattoos, I've found all of them--but her skin was too white, so it took me alot of time."

Riko said as she walked to my side.

Her footsteps... there was some staggering.

A very light stagger.

It has been... 3 minutes since she started fighting.

The poison from the earring that has entered her body--has started circulating.

"Are you fine... Riko?"

".... Left and right thighs, just below the right breast, and below the belly button. The eyeball tattoos are concentrated around the thighs and stomach."

The unlimited regenerative capabilities of a vampire, comes from something known as "Demon Entrails", an organ that humans do not possess.

The most problematic thing about the Demon Entrails is that there are four of them, if one or two were destroyed, the other Demon Entrails can restore them swiftly.

So, if you want to kill a vampire, all four Demon Entrails must be destroyed at the same time.

The eyeball diagrams which looks like tattoos on Hilda's body, mark the position of the Demon Entrails, but--

"While I know the positions.... But what should we do, the Beretta only has 1 bullet left."

A voice came out behind me suddenly.

"Th.. there's still... two shots..."

Aria, who had been unconscious after being electrocuted was finally awake, she walked to my side as she spoke.

Then she hid under my shadow--

Removing 2 hair clips which looked like fingernails.

"She conducted a body search on me, but didn't manage to find these."

Following that, she broke open the hair-clips.

Removing the bottom part of the hair-clip, a hole could be seen in it.

And inside the hole, there was one .45 ACP bullet.

"In the past, this was used to hide drugs... But after encountering several situations where I didn't have enough ammo, I have started hiding bullets within. Riko, pass me back my guns."

Aria drew both of her guns from the side of Riko's thighs, and with one hand acting as a shield from the rain, her other hand loaded one bullet into the chamber of each gun.

The silver and black M1911 pistols gleamed coldly as if brought back to life.

"--Ki-kun, Aria, thank you both. But no need to worry, Riko has another way."

"Another way...? Are you trying to say you still have other ways to kill Hilda...?"

Hearing this, Riko's eyes became sharp as she nodded her head.

"I had intended to use that method to perish together with her if I were at my wits end. But to use that method, her wings must be dealt with first, so she can't fly around rampantly."

....I see.

That was why she went trigger-happy with the silver bullets.

"But... how will you be able to do it by yourself? The Beretta should have only one round left?"

Listening to Aria, Riko shook her head and answered.

"The reason I kept this bullet, is meant to kill Hilda once she loses her Demon Entrails."

The word "kill' made me crease my brow--

"....."

At this time, I noticed the unusual reactions from Hilda from the corner of my eye.

She has stripped off her torn and tattered Lolita-gothic clothes, leaving only her purple underwear on her body.

Traces of electricity still covered her body, protecting her as she recovers her strength.

But still... I have a bad feeling about this.

--Her appearance--

Although her snow white skin made it difficult for people to see clearly, but there were definitely eyeball diagrams on her skin.

One on each leg, one under the navel, and one below the right breast.

I can see it, right now all her weak points are exposed. But, this instead--

Gave me a weird feeling that I can't really put into words.

"--Wait, Riko."

"If you are trying to persuade me to follow the Butei Law... I'm sorry, Ki-kun."

"No, I feel... something amiss with Hilda's body. If you have some sort of plan, then--don't use it now no matter what, we'll think of another way to hit those four points to take her out."

I held Riko by her shoulders, staring at her without looking away as I told her--

Seeing this, Riko blinked her eyes in confusion.

"....All right, since you put it that way, I'll listen to you... But what do we do now? We have three guns, and just three bullets as well, if we intend to hit all four weak points... From the point of physics, it's impossible."

"Sorry, my physics is terrible."

My voice became drowned out by the sound of thunder which was getting closer than before.

Aria seemed to have noticed this as well, she lifted her camellia eyes, scanning the skies around us like a small animal.

If the sound of thunder really roars, Aria, who fears thunder, will become severely hampered, just like during our battle with Vlad.

Attacking the four points at the same time--if we want to do it, we

have to do it now.

"Aria, I'll need your help when we attack. Use your guns to attack Hilda's right chest and lower abdomen. I know Assault's training involves not going for the vitals, so, can you do it?"

"Yes, Yes."

Speaking in a slightly more serious tone, I saw Aria nodding her head like a child.

Because as long as I am in Hysteria mode, she normally listens to me.

"Riko, you attack Hilda's right leg. The fourth point--I'll deal with it, although Riko, you feel this is impossble--but ever since ancient times, humans have achieved many seemingly impossible dreams. So let us perform for her, she looks down on humans, and it's time to pay the price."

As I was saying this, I stood beside Riko.

"Tonight, for Riko--I shall turn the impossible into possible."

".....for, Riko..."

Riko raised her eyes to look at me, her gaze seemingly touched.

She used the soft curls of her hair to raise the Beretta.

"Understood, let's go, Ki-kun."

"Good girl."

I patted Riko lightly on the head, focusing the rest of my attention on Hilda.

Having healed all her wounds except than her wings, Hilda was now holding her trident and advancing towards us.

The electric current surrounding her wasn't large, but coming into contact will still cause a nasty shock.

Suffice to say, using swords or knives were out of the question.

We'll just have take to the fight relying on the insufficient number of bullets we have.

"Shoot...the right, leg--"

Riko suddenly reeled forward, but Aria caught her in time.

"Riko, can you stand?! If not, you can lean on me for support when you open fire."

"Haha.. Great grandfather must be cursing me in heaven.... Leaning on a lady from the Holmes family for support while fighting side by side..."

"I'm not willing either, I don't want to fight side by side with a lady from the Lupin family."

"Aria..."

"What is it. All right, steady yourself."

"The one I hate the most is still you, heheh..."

"Oh, looks like we have very similar dispositions, me too, I hate you the most, haha."

The two of them started talking to each other light-heartedly like two normal girls, following which--

Ka-chik, Ka-chik.

Three guns pointed at Hilda at the same time.

"........!?"

A nervous expression showed on Hilda's face for a brief moment, but--

"Oh... You've fallen short, with just three guns, what do you intend to do with me?"

She started laughing as if a weight has been lifted off her shoulders.

(I guess this what there mean by every cloud has a silver lining.)

--If there are four guns now, Hilda might have fled long ago.

If she escapes, we will come under attack again.

By then, the Riko who's willing to perish together with Hilda... will no longer be around.

"Let's go...! Wait for my signal--then shoot!"

Yelling to the other two, I charged straight at Hilda--

Even though I boasted to the two girls beforehand... But in fact up till now, I still haven't thought of a way to hit all four vitals at the same time using three bullets.

But charging out, that is enough for now.

I'm now completely unarmed, without as much as a nail clipper on me.

But I can succeed.

I will succeed. No, I must succeed.

People always tend to declare something as impossible at first glance. I will make it possible. In order to do this, I must first charge out with an unshakeable faith, a courage that is required from the very start.

(--I'll just make things up on the go!)

The instant Hilda aimed the trident at me, my brain under the influence of Hysteria mode gave me an excellent idea immediately--

I recalled how Hilda had wrapped her whip around the Holy Cross Sword before, and flung the sword away like a catapult from the Middle Ages.

At this very moment, I see it.

Like shining brightly--a way out.

--This will be it!

Side-stepping to the left in the rain, I avoided the pointed end of Hilda's trident.

Then I swiftly circled 5 meters behind Hilda's back.

Splashing the water on the surface of the ground, I twisted my body like a drifting racing car--

Focusing on the lower half of Hilda's body which was more toned then I imagined.

"Riko! Aria! --Shoot!"

Borrowing the momentum from my body twisting, I intend to use the single-handed version of 'Slash'--spiraling my entire body.

Now, it's time for OFG to take center stage--I raised my right hand, which was fitted with the 'Python'[4] glove over my head.

--Bang Bang! Bang!--

--Aria, and Riko--

At the instant both of them fired the three bullets.

Everything around me turned into slow motion--as if taken from a highly sensitive video camera.

The Purified Silver Bullet is a bullet made of pure silver.

Silver carries less weight than lead of the same size, it would be unable to fully withstand the explosive pressure from the gunpowder when fired from the gun.

As such, the silver bullet fired from Riko's Beretta should travel slower than the speed of sound--

--Shick... Shick.... Shick--

Her bullet, almost matching the sonic speed of the .45 ACP bullets fired by Aria, hit Hilda at the same time.

"--!"

The flashes from the 3 shots turning Hilda into a silhouette--

Although the bullets penetrated below her right chest, lower abdomen and right leg, she was still standing at the same spot.

It looks like she intends to rely on the Demonic Entrail in her left leg to salvage the situation.

--At this time, the firing sounds from the three guns reached my ear at the speed of sound--

I can see Riko's silver bullet which has penetrated Hilda's right leg flying in my direction.

Good, now it's my turn.

Shifting my body to dodge the two bullets from Aria at the very last moment--

--zzzzzz--!

Using two fingers on my right hand, clipping on to the silver bullet fired by Riko.

The TNK fibre on 'Python' was generating massive amount of sparks.

The sparks, made it seems as if I was holding a dazzling ball of fire in my hand.

(--'Slingshot'--!)

I didn't allow the bullet to pass through my fingers.

Instead, with the premise of maintaining the speed of the bullet as much as possible, I changed its vector.

In my fight with Watson, I changed it by 30 degrees.

If 30 degrees is achievable--

Then 60 degrees, 90 degrees--

(--Even if it's 180 degrees, it can be done!)

The bullet followed suit as I twisted my body 180 degrees--then, I released my fingers--

--Bam--!!

Following a perfect trajectory, the bullet struck the left leg of Hilda from behind.

--Not even 0.1 seconds has passed since the shots were first fired.

The time it took the three bullets to hit the four vitals was faster than Hilda's speed of regeneration....

"....."

Hit by four shots, Hilda's steps came to a abrupt stop.

Then she turned her head to look behind, to see me still in the action of releasing the bullet.

--Her face was filled with disbelief.

Yes, you can't believe it.

You actually lost to humans whom you've stepped on--not even in your dreams have you imagined such a thing happening.

But now, this has become a fact.

How does it feel, vampire of realism?

"Des teapta-te roma ne..... din somnul cel de moarte...."

Is this, a poem....? Hilda was speaking in Romanian...

Maybe a curse... it's like reading a poem.

"In care te-ada ncira..... barbari...dc....ti...ra...ni"

Following that, Hilda knelt on the ground... her body leaning forward slightly.

Finally, she lowered her head in the rain--

And no longer made any sound.

Darkness of Grenada. Dracula Hilda--

Is no more.

Father and daughter, died in the hands of the same 3-man team.

".....Riko...."

Brought back to reality by the nervous tone of Aria's voice, I saw Riko leaning on Aria's shoulder with her head lowered.

I rushed to their side, and dragged Riko over to where she had pointed... Near the flowers beside Hilda's coffin.

Then I let her sit on the ground with her back resting on the coffin--

"....This is great, we succeeded....! Really, the both of you, should be happy..."

Seeing the worry on our faces, she forced out a smile.

But the smile couldn't hide the fact her body condition was spent.

Hilda mentioned--the earring contained enough poison to kill 10 people.

7 minutes has passed since the earring blew up.

(Gotta get her to a Hospital quickly...!)

But getting down the Sky Tree, would take at least 5 minutes.

Maybe Aria also realised... this, she just quietly kept herself at Riko's side.

"Ki-kun, Aria, don't be sad. Riko... feels very good inside now."

.....Riko....

"Riko... Riko has given everything for the fight... Giving everything... such matters, I have.... been through so many times... Since when, I began to fear death... Heheh..."

Riko....!

"Actually, I understood quite some time ago... why I didn't want to die... it's because... Ki-kun...I've met Ki-kun..."

With tears brimming in her eyes, Riko forced an expression of happiness and reached out with her trembling hand...

As for me, except for holding her hand, I couldn't do anything else--

And att this moment. --Flash--!

The lightning was coming nearer and nearer, causing Aria to show increasing alarm.

Riko eyes widened into circles, as she stared in astonishment.

Not because of the thunder, but something behind me--

She was staring right at the place where Hilda had fallen.

".....?"

I turned my head to take a look....

....'sssssssss'....

As the roar of the thunder faded, a silhouette of a person stood up, holding the trident--

"Hohoho--how are you feeling, Fourth?"

--Hilda....!

Wh... what the hell is going on?

The penetration wounds on her lower right chest and lower abdomen were completely healed.

The penetration wounds on both legs caused by the silver bullet were healing very slowly, but... they were without a doubt gradually closing.

"Why....?! We definitely hit all 4 Demon Entrails...!"

Aria straightened her body, gnashing her teeth at the immortal Dracula Hilda.

"Ah, not bad, you have such delightful expressions on your faces, especially--Riko. It's such a pity, since you were even prepared to give up your life for this fight.... Well, as you can see, I'm as good as new. So, what are your feelings now? Hohoho, it's too late for regrets, I'm going to skewer all of you together, that'll definitely be interesting."

Hilda covered her mouth with the back of her hand as she laughed.

Then she raised the trident, waving it in the direction of the storm clouds.

"Originally the places where my Demon Entrails were located did not have any weird appearance, but unexpectedly, these digusting eyeball diagrams were marked onto them sometime after. So--not even letting my father know--I underwent surgery to change the positions of my Demon Entrails, hohoho, wo--hohohohoho!"

In the midst of the ear-splitting laughter that was approaching ultrasound, the bats that had gathered at the floor below us swarmed up.

Behind Hilda, was a mad scene of torrential rain and criss-crossing lightning.

"--Take a guess, where are my Demon Entrails?"

In the roar of thunder, Hilda puffed out her chest while wearing only her purple underwear.

"Actually, I don't even know myself, it was intentional. Because if I knew, I might divulge the information to another person. Since the scars of the operation have completely vanished, and I--have silenced the surgeon. The answer is forever buried in the dark, and no one knows."

.....!

No wonder... she had the guts to brazenly show off her thighs from the very beginning.

I finally understood--

The weird feeling I had earlier, was due to the fact she "didn't hide her eyeball diagrams".

When Riko shredded her clothes, and she used her electricity to force Riko to back off--even with all 4 of the weak points revealed, she didn't show the slightest trace of worry.

She wasn't afraid if anyone saw.

Because under the eyeball diagrams, there were no Demon Entrails at all--

"Ahhh, the weather is simply too pleasant."

Kaboom...

Hilda appeared to be enjoying the sound of thunder which was very close.

Aria began to cringe--and Riko, was simply staring contemptuously at Hilda.

"Fourth, 121 years ago, at the incomplete Eiffel Tower--my father fought with your great grandfather--Arsene Lupin. It's such a coincidence that right now, the progenies of both sides are fighting on this incomplete tower..... Come to think of it, this tower isn't too bad, it's tall enough, so I like it very much, It's just that I never thought that the builders of the tallest tower in the world today will

be the Oriental monkies."

Hilda gazed lovingly at a cluster of storm clouds.

"I have constantly been waiting for such fine weather, which is why, I even called Watson out tonight. Now, allow me to tell you... why the Dracula clan prefers to fight on the top of towers during nights with thunderstorm...."

Finished speaking, Hilda lifted her head to look at the clouds--

As lightning drew a path across the sky,she raised the trident high above her head.

"--!"

The metal spear became a lightning rod, shining white rays of light from thick dark clouds focusing on its body--

KAKA--BOOM....!

With the violent explosion of thunder, everything was enveloped in a flash of light.

"Kyaaaaaaaa!"

Aria screamed out in total panic.

"--!"

I hurriedly raised both arms to shield my face. After a while, I tried to open my eyes....

In front of me, the rain drops had been evaporated into steam by high temperature, creating a white mist.

As the steam dissipated into the darkness, it enhanced a supernatural scene from another world.

"--This is the third time throughout my life, that I have transformed into the Third stage,

On the other side of the white fog--

Hilda was standing there, looking pleased.

The electricity covering her body was not golden in colour like before.

The electricity was bluish-white in colour, and appeared to be extremely strong, it's as though if you go anywhere near her, you will be reduced to nothing more than black coals.

All that's left on her body were her underwear, heels, and torn and tattered tights which does not conduct electricity. The ribbons on her hair has long been reduced to ashes--her long golden hair waving savagely in the violent wind

This is practically...a demon.

It sure as hell doesn't look like it belongs to this world....!

"My father was cursed by the Witch of the Sand-- and couldn't transform into his third form, he could only fight all of you in his second form. I hate the second form which causes the body to hideously expand, so I skipped it and directly entered the third form. All right, enough chatter, let's start playing."

The bluish-white lightning was jumping non-stop all over the trident and Hilda's body.

With a bang, she rested the trident on the ground--

The lightning skimmed across the concrete surface, causing spiderweb-like cracks.

"If we say the first form takes after a human, and the second form takes after a demon--then the third form, takes after God. This is a miracle made into a reality by the Dracula Clan who are able to manipulate electricity and possesses unlimited regeneration. Yes, lightning itself is a miracle, and I was born with the ability to conduct electricity with ease. This is a sign of a God who can create lightning, and proof that I am destined to become close to God."

Clack-'zzzzz'.... Clack-'zzzzz'.... Hilda slowly got nearer walking on her heels.

As she pointed her trident, it generated a loud booming sound like a mortar being fired, damaging a corner of the coffin.

Inside the coffin--thick plates of copper were twisted into a heap.

Such... such terrifying power, it's even more extreme as compared to her father.

"--So, I no longer require electricity from humans! Wohohohoho! Come, take a good look! Show me your fear and your tears! Beg for my forgiveness!"

With her sadistic nature surging forth, Hilda, in order to make us experience terror--

Clang! Clang!

She bent a steel support column at the edge of the Second Observation Deck by striking it with the trident.

--Making use of this opportunity, I confirmed the condition of Aria and Riko.

Aria--not good.

Although from her eyes I could see she hasn't lost the will to fight, but the thunderclap just now has caused her to completely cower in fear.

Riko.... can no longer fight.

Besides leaning limply against the coffin on her back and staring at Hilda, she couldn't do anything else.

"--Riko, no, Aria, lend me your sword."

As the only one who could still fight, I drew one of the twin Kodachi from Riko's back.

As there was no way to approach Hilda, whose body is surrounded by electricity--

"Hilda!"

I could only throw out the sword like a dart, aiming for her foot which was on the edge of the Second Observation Deck.

Swoosh--!

The spinning blade cut into Hilda's Achilles.

"....."

But it was ineffective, as the wound vanished without a trace.

I had hoped she would have fallen off the tower.... but there was no reaction at all.

A bolt of lightning flashed by--Hilda lifted her face--

Showing her fangs, she started to smile.

"I had initially planned to turn Aria into a specimen--sorry, it isn't possible now."

Crackle... Crackle....

As Hilda raised the trident high up, bluish-white lightning started to surge at the tip.

"In my third form--anything i touch, will be reduced to ashes--"

Ball lightning....!

A spherical ball of lightning started to form at the tip of the trident.

No.... not right, the colour isn't right.

This mass of ball lightning was emitting a dazzling deep blue light, and it seems the voltage is extremely high.

Even the form is different.

Overflowing with energy, it was emitting light in an unsteady manner, rather than calling it a ball, it's more like a group of stars.

Even though we didn't come into direct contact with it, but the various types of metals on our bodies--watches, buttons, and the cellphones in our pockets all started to release very weak electrical currents.

"This will be a reward to all of you for lasting so long against me. The secret art of the Dracula clan--'Lightning Star', I'll be using it to reduce all of you into coals, then I'll skewer it into a stick and present it to my father as a gift."

....What a tasteless gift.

Holding back my tongue, I saw that Hilda was increasing the size of the ball lightning with each passing second.

Since this is the case--

The only thing I can do now...is kamikaze.

With my body in Hysteria mode, I will charge into Hilda at full strength, and in exchange for being reduced to coal by her lightning--push her off the tower. Really hot-blooded stuff.

This is...the only way. What a pity.

--No matter what, I must protect Aria and Riko.

This is the Hysteria mode...no, this is my duty as a man.

I silently drew out the last kodachi as a show of force.

Just when I was about to step onto the coffin Hilda was standing on, shielding the two girls behind me--

"The persistence of human life, should be beautified with flowers... That was what my mother, said..."

Riko's voice came behind me.

(....?)

I tilted the katana to its side, so that the shiny reflective surface of

the blade showed Riko's reflection.

Riko was hugging a large bouquet of flowers which was originally placed around the coffin.

They were sunflowers, most suited for the cheerful and bubbly Riko.

"So... Hilda, let me give you, this bouquet of flowers as a farewell..."

Hilda turned her gaze onto Riko behind me.

"Hoho.. to think Fourth still has such elegance, but please permit me to refuse. I hate sunflowers... it has such a disgusting appearance. I think you know as well, I like dark places the best."

"Hoho.... Then for you who likes the dark, let me give you a Japanese idiom--'The shadow under the lamp'[5]..... No matter what may appear beside one's feet... normally, one would not be aware of it."

The blade reflected the pleased smile on Riko.

She slowly began removing sunflowers from the bouquet.

"This thing can't be used too near and not too far, it requires the optimum distance..."

Peeking out from the bouquet of flowers, was part of a gun's body--

--Winchester M1887.

"Shotgun...."

Beside Riko, Aria's eyes widened into circles.

....So that's it....!

"Riko, you're--a genius!"

I threw myself to the side of the coffin and flattened my body on the ground. With my 'disappearance', Hilda found herself staring down the business end of the gun--

Immediately drawing in a breath of cold air.

"Hoho, this is a really suitable angle, Hilda, you're done for..."

Aria supported Riko's trembling arm--

--BAM!!!

The ear-splitting sound of the gunshot reverberated throughout the Second Observation Deck.

Different from a normal gun or sniper rifle which shoots out only 1 round, the shotgun shell--

--'Pa'!

Spread outwards into countless little pellets.

Using my eyes in Hysteria mode I captured their numbers---more than a hundred, all micro-sized soft metal pellets.

--'Pa pa pa pa'--!!!

"--Waahhhh!"

Covering a huge area of effect, none of the pellets missed their mark, hitting all parts of Hilda's body.

That's right, using the shotgun--

We can attack her entire body, not needing to care where the Demon Entrails are!

"Ahhhh... Guuhhh... Guhhhh...!"

Struck by numerous pellets, Hilda stumbled and staggered onto one knee.

At the same time, the blue-coloured 'Lightning Star' melted back into the spear--'sssssssss'!

The electric currents flowed through Hilda's body, right to below her feet.

"---Kyaaaaaaa---"

In an instant, flames consumed Hilda's entire body.

Normally, even if the skin was burnt, the wounds would have healed instantly, but now...

Hilda was being incinerated by the high voltage electricity she was controlling.

(...The unlimited regeneration has vanished...)

So were all four Demon Entrails pierced by the shotgun pellets?!

--Arghhhh....!

Hilda screamed in extreme agony, then she fell off the black coffin.

"Argh....! This.... this is a nightmare... a nightmare.... Im.. impossible...! I am a true vampire, to be defeated by these people.... impossible...!"

Hilda has lost her wings, and couldn't turn into a shadow as well--

She was wriggling on the ground constantly, trying to get away from our side.

But the flames have obscured her ability to tell direction, so in the end she was simply stuck in the same spot.

Aria had taken out handcuffs in order to arrest Hilda... But soon, she realised she was unable to do anything to her.

It's the same for me as well.

The on-going scene was becoming too gruesome. I tried to help Hilda, but the huge flames prevented me for getting any closer.

"Hilda... Not there, don't go over!"

I yelled loudly at Hilda, as she moved towards the edge of the observation deck--

I don't know if she heard me while being burnt.

Struggling in pain, Hilda's palm finally slipped carelessly from the edge--

"Ahhh..."

From the flames, came the final cry--

".....!"

Not bearing to watch, I averted my gaze, Hilda's distancing cries were like a stabbing pain in my eardrums.

The sound fell below 450m, and then below... Impact...

...Then...

Everything was quiet.

The only sound carried to our ears, was the pitter patter of rain hitting our bodies.

(Hilda....)

Although a wicked woman, she did live her life to the fullest, a proud and beautiful adversary....

Just that her ending was too tragic.

Return to silence. Return to the darkness--where the bats rest.

"Ki-kun...."

It was Riko mumbling softly.

"It was fortunate you told me not to use the shotgun just now... If it was used, Riko.... would have only aimed for Hilda's body and legs--and we would have lost. Then, she would have taken the shotgun, and everything would be finished..."

Cradling the gun in the rain, Riko looked upwards at the sky.

"....This time, Riko... has turned back, to the real Riko..."

Her hollow pupils have lost focus.

"Defeating Vlad and Hilda, regaining my... freedom. But in the end, I still couldn't defeat Ki-kun and Aria... heheh... not only that, we even fought side by side..."

Riko's face was still full of delight...

I knelt on one knee at her side, hugging her by the shoulders.

"Okay.... that's enough Riko. The 'real you' changes as time changes. Right now, you are not alone. The Riko with companions to fight side by side with--that is the real Riko right now."

"Ki-kun..."

"Yes, Riko. Helping others is much more difficult than defeating others."

In the midst of a thunderclap receding, Aria started to help Riko up.

"This is why--I must save you."

She threw a look at me, and we both helped Riko to her feet.

"--Let's go Riko, hold on!"

We started walking down the stairs.

More than 10 minutes has passed since the earring exploded, and Riko was no longer responding to our voices--

But even so, we still continued calling out her name.

3rd Ammo: Secret Rehabilitation -Boy Meets Girl-

The following dawn after the two continuous battles with Watson and Hilda--

I woke up from a long bench in front of Butei Hospital's ICU.

Seeing the clear blue skies outside the window, the rain seems to have stopped.

(My whole body... hurts like hell...)

When in Hysteria mode, I am able to perform tasks that far exceeds the limits of my body. Especially since I used Ouka, Slash and Mirror Shot, 3 skills in all last night. So it's pretty much expected that my entire body will be aching.

I slowly sat up, and noticed that the light was still on for the "In Operation" sign above the ICU door.

(Riko...)

Feeling worried, I felt the urge to barge in to see...

"Meow-chuu!" Sleeping on the long bench beside mine, Aria woke up like a kitten which had just sneezed.

"Erm... Kinji... Where's Ri.. Riko?"

Sitting up suddenly, Aria noticed the "In Operation" sign lit up in red light, and stopped talking.

When Riko got to the First Observation Deck, her heart had already stopped beating.

Leaving the resuscitation to Aria, I hurriedly took the now-functioning elevator down to the ground level... Using a public

phone, I managed to get a helicopter from Logi, and help arrived 20 minutes later.

Since there was a precedent case of someone being revived after the heart had stopped beating for 4 minutes, I cannot give up as well--using the phrases I learn in Assault to encourage myself as I made my way back to the observation deck--

--Watson was giving medical aid to Riko.

Being a doctor, Watson made Riko consume a drug which she uses to fake "death" in order to escape, causing Riko to temporarily slip into a state of apparent death... She seems to have done the same for Hilda, who, had fallen from the Second Observation Deck to the First Observation Deck. Hilda had suffered extensive burn injuries, fallen from a height of over 100 meters... but she was still alive. She wasn't moving at all, and it wouldn't be much of a surprise if she died at any moment.

Watson suggested sending both of them, whom are on the brink of death, back to Butei Hospital--

We borrowed Watson's Porsche, and sped back to Butei High in the dead of the night.

Claiming to have gotten an International Driving Licence, Aria's driving was terrible. Maybe it was because she was worried about Riko, and the anxiety had affected her....

Just as I was recalling the events from the previous night--the light went out from the "In Operation" sign,

In a fluster, Aria and myself entered the ICU which was filled with countless drugs and medical equipment.

"Riko...."

Aria spoke as she ran to Riko's hospital bed--

Riko was half sitting up on the bed.

She seemed to be in a bit of a stupor... This is really great. Riko has

been saved!

"Riko! Riko! ...I thought you really died!"

Wanting to pounce onto Riko, Aria was stopped by Watson.

Looking around me, I discovered that there was no one else in the ICU besides our group.

".....So did you remove the poison in her body, Watson."

"I couldn't have done it alone, but thanks to the assistance from Ambulace's Yatsuro-sensei, it was a success. She's really a genius. The deadly poison didn't even make her break a sweat."

"Erin Yatsuro-sensei, she doesn't seem to be here....?"

"I've asked her to leave for a moment. I have to speak with all of you about something."

"Fuhhh--" Exhausted from working overnight, Watson took off the surgical mask and let out a deep breath.

I walked to the side of the bed, trying to look at Riko's condition....

But Riko lowered her head, as if trying to avoid me.

"Riko.....?"

I thought she would be happy to have survived this... What's going on.

We stayed silent like this for a while--

"Kinji... Aria... I'm... very ashamed."

Riko was talking softly, using the "Dark Riko" way of speaking.

"I obeyed Hilda's orders to trick Kinji. And I even stood by and almost did nothing when Aria was in peril. But both of you pushovers still.... forgave me. That time, I wanted to repay my debt of gratitude. So, during the explosive bubble attack.... I was determined to use my life to repay this debt. I really wanted to use

my death as payment--but in the end I still shamelessly prolonged my feeble existence and survived..."

Riko's voice was trembling from remorse.

Hey.... Hey hey...

Seriously, no matter when, her sense of pride is always so strong.

"....Riko, you've been very brave."

After hearing what Riko said, Aria... replied with a serious expression on her face.

"I thought you would have definitely said something like 'I'm saved, thanks--', and then become evasive about matters concerning Hilda. But now, you've honestly told us what you were really thinking, you really are very brave."

Aria's camellia eyes were looking straight at Riko--

Having slightly withdrawn back into herself, Riko looked back at Aria.... then with a bit of shyness shifted her gaze away.

"Aria, Kinji.... I will definitely repay your kindness..."

Her voice was still trembling... but this time, her words felt like it carried tears of joy.

Hearing what Riko said, Aria suddenly felt embarrassed, and with a awkward look on her face, she whispered to me "Hey, you should say something too!"....

"Ahhh--ermm... Yesterday's.... I was only concerned about fighting. As for something like repaying us or not, don't worry about it."

"Is that all!" Aria angrily told me as I finished what I wanted to say.

It, it can't be helped. I'm not in Hysteria mode now.

I have no way of coming up with honeyed words to comfort girls on the verge of tears.

The atmosphere was becoming awkward.... Because Aria kept staring at me, I had no choice but to say something.

"Ahh--just to be prudent, I need to ask you something. Those guys.... do they have any more vampire comrades?"

".....Vlad's wife has died from an illness. They aren't like what you see in comics where they can bite people to increase their numbers, there's only the two of them."

"I see, Then... you can breath a sigh of relief now. That's really great."

The normal me can only talk about normal things like these.

Listening to me, Riko slightly nodded her head as if agreeing.

"Yes.... up till now, somewhere in my heart, Vlad and Hilda has always been confining me. Because I wanted to break free, I have always been fighting. But, when they were gone.... I became free.... But yet, I feel uneasy now...."

"Uneasy?"

"I was referring to what I should do from now on...."

"What an extravagant worry. All you have to do is just be carefree like the Riko we always know."

To me, discussing with girls about their worries is more challenging than taking the entrance exams to Tokyo University.

Hence, the words I said were very neutral. But Riko seemed to like what I said... she started to chuckle.

"Yeah. Like Riko... right."

"Ah. That's to say 'Riko must be the real Riko'. This is the true meaning for you."

"Uhn Uhn" Riko nodded her head, acknowledging the matter-of-fact words from the normal me.

Her head was still lowered... although her cheeks seemed to be reddening.

It's probably the after-effects of the poison, or it could be due to fever.

It will be too pitiful if Riko has to continue listening to my poor speeches.

Aria was telling me with her expression "Well done", so now is the time to retreat.

"Well... take good care of yourself now."

Just as we were about to move out of the room, Watson stopped us--

"Well, taking this opportunity while you all are re-establishing your close relationships, I have one thing to say."

"One thing...?"

"It's concerning Hilda."

Ah, there were so many things going on, I forgot about this one.

Hilda... What is it about?

"I'll say this upfront, I'm both a Butei and a Doctor. Even if it's the enemy, once the battle is over, I do not make any discrimination among the wounded. I won't continue to harass them for beatings, and I do not differentiate between personalities, nationalities or types of humans when rendering medical aid.

Types of humans.....

Are vampires considered types of humans?

Forget it. Hilda does have the appearance of a human anyway.

"Anyway, I removed the shotgun pellets in Hilda's body just now--107 in all. Although her Demon Entrails were not functioning,

but because of her amazing vitality, she has made it through the operation. Her body cannot move, there is no consciousness, and she requires a breathing apparatus to help her breathe.... But her life seems determined to live on. Although this is offensive for her, but I took a photo of her current condition."

Saying this, Watson showed us the image of Hilda taken with a digital camera.

Having her entire body burnt by flames, you can say Hilda got what she deserved from her own actions... She was bandaged like a mummy, and there was casts on her arms and legs which appeared to have suffered broken bones. It was really a pitiful sight.

...Then again, she's actually still alive while in this condition, no wonder she's a vampire.

A Rosario was placed on her chest, and on closer inspection, I discovered that a seal *"Anti Ki-Barai-Kekkai area"*, was written on the surface. I'm not too sure of the details, but it seems the item was used to keep Hilda safe while she was in the magical barrier set up by Tamamo.

"Just to add on, this is my first time stitching up Demon Entrails, so I was unable to perform it flawlessly... plus, I was forced to cut out several tissues within. But I won't be performing this surgery in vain, I swear to use them as research material to create a drug to inhibit the functions of Demon Entrails--a serum to hinder vampires!"

Doctor Watson, you talk too much.

What were you trying to tell us from the start.

"However... since daybreak, her physical appearance has started to worsen. The main reason is due to insufficient blood. When I arrived here I ran some checks on Hilda's blood type. She has the Rhesus--River B blood type, a rare blood type which only 1 person in 1,700,000 people have. The only place in the world which stocks this blood type is the Blood Bank in Singapore, but getting it here will take 2 days. So.... I'm afraid Hilda might not live past today."

....Is that so....

Knowing that such a troublesome adversary is about to die... I had a sudden urge to save her.

Thinking like this, maybe I'm really a pushover like Hilda said.

"Can't we do anything about it?"

Aria, an even greater pushover than me, asked Watson.

"If there is someone with the same blood type here, she can still be saved..."

Saying this, Watson, for some reason, looked over at Riko.

"Her blood type is the same as mine. And because we have the same blood type, Vlad refuses to give me up."

After a moment of silence, Riko closed her eyes and said without any expression on her face.

(So that's how it is. This explains why Vlad was so stubbornly after Riko.)

Actually, I have been puzzled by this for quite some time. If you are looking for humans who possesses superior genes, there's plenty of such people throughout the world. If you want the DNA, all you require is simply a strand of hair.

But all Vlad wants to do is simply have Riko at his side--this mystery has finally been solved.

To Vlad, Riko--possesses both superior genes and the same rare blood type as the vampires. Hence, having Riko equates to killing two birds with one stone.

But Hilda seems to be unaware of this.

"Actually... Riko Mine, I know your blood type. It was Yatsuro-sensei who told me. --As a doctor, no matter what kinds of villain, I cannot stand by idly and watch a person die. Life is precious."

Hey.

You've got some cheek saying that, Watson.

You tried to kill me just yesterday.

"But I won't force you to donate your blood, Riko. Winner takes all, and the loser submits... Although it is an unwritten rule that the defeated party in a war is to follow the wishes of the victor, but I hope Hilda doesn't have to obey this rule."

Is there such a rule in war...

Turning the topic aside, when Hilda recovers, will she be forcibly shoved to me?

That violent Ojou-sama is extremely troublesome. She has already created problems for someone (me) once.

"And, Hilda has been in E.U. to study for a period of time, perhaps if we can talk to her, she might be willing to testify in court for Kanae Kanzaki-san."

Watson was nervously observing Riko's reactions...

Staying silent for a while, Riko suddenly looked at Aria...

Then, she extended her arm towards Watson.

"--Ok. Will you draw my blood now?" As Aria was about to praise Riko, Riko blushed and averted her gaze.

"This... this is nothing--it's not because I want to repay my debt of gratitude towards Aria. This, that's.... because there's no reason to let that person die. Riko will only kill those who must be killed. Since Ki-kun said 'there's no need to repay anything', then I'm really not going to do anything. I'll just be an affectionate thief!"

Saying this, Riko swished her head to one side.

That's good. It looks like the usual Riko now.

"That's right. You're a great thief. Thanks for everything, Miss Phantom Thief." **(This is spoken in french)**

Aria chuckled as she replied in french. Leaving instructions on other matters for Watson to carry out, she left the ICU with me.

We started heading back to the Dorms under the brilliant sunrise.

As both Aria and myself kept yawning non-stop due to lack of sleep, we occasionally bumped into each other while walking somewhat unsteadily.

"I say, Riko... may be petite but she has a big heart. She did save Hilda in the end."

"That kid is gentle by nature, and fragile when dealing with emotions. Although she very strict with herself, but she's gentle to other people."

Aria, if you can notice such things, then you should learn something out of it.

Especially the part on being "gentle to other people"!

"Regardless, we've won our first battle. Even though not all our members were involved in the fight, it's still a victory for Team Baskerville."

"You're right. Even though there were some heated friction within our team during the battle."

"It's fine, even if there's friction, even if there's some displeasure within the team, but we will still fight as one when the situation calls for it. This the meaning of the team. With all that, the unity of our team will become even closer."

Saying all these, Aria placed both hands on her hips, and looked up at me accusingly.

"But we can never be too careless, Kinji. You fall prey very easily to Riko's charms. Riko still sees us as her opponents, and may still confront us with raised guns."

Fall prey easily to her charms... Aria mentioned this out of the blue. But due to my past track records, I have no way refuting her words.

What Aria said has some truth in it.

Riko is a person who acts based on her feelings.

She may have helped us last night, but who knows when she will start a fight with us again.

"Ahh... Riko has been turning into our enemy and our friend for twice now. If there's a second time, then there will be a third. Although she may have helped us this time, once the third time comes... she'll be fighting us again."

I said, as I walked and yawn at the same time.

"If there's a fourth time, she'll be helping us then. Riko and the two of us are probably the type of people who get along better the more we fight."

"Uhn. Maybe. So, can you do it? We'll be teammates with her from now on--"

"Ah, of course I can. Even if there's someone we have to be cautious about among our companions, it isn't too bad. I can still tolerate this kind of things. Frenemies... I guess every high school student will have this kind of relationship with at least one person."

"Uhn, maybe. That's remarkable, Kinji. Well done."

"It's nothing, but usually, as long as the opponent doesn't have a gun, it's still safe even if it's an enemy."

I patted on the Beretta at the waist with my hand. But my elbow collided with the shoulder of Aria who was so tired she was basically staggering ... Bump.

Some cloth-like thing fell out from within Aria's blouse.

"......?'

"......?'

Both of us looked besides our feet.....

It was something cloth-like, or something made of cloth that had dropped on the ground.

The cloth was full of holes, old and worn, with childish poker-card patterns printed on it.

There were even a few strands of something like silk threads on the cloth.

"--!"

.....This, this is.....!

The thing destroyed by Hilda's chainsaw, Aria, Aria's br... bra!!

Already torn and tattered into pieces, the bra was still forcibly being worn. And unfortunately due to my elbow, finally--

The bra resting on the flat chest could no longer persevere, dropping out of the blouse, resting in pieces (pun intended).

Crackle crackle!!!

A killing intent comparable to Hilda's electric shock was directed at me from Aria.

".....Kin....ji.....!! You, you, you....., pervert.....!!!"

I felt as if my mortified expression can already be used for my funeral's black and white portrait.

With her face as red as a baboon's bottom, Aria was in a state of fury.

"On this, this kind of road! In public! You still do such things to me!!"

Swiftly and suddenly, like an eagle hunting a rabbit, Aria clutched the ragged bra, of which the padding could be clearly seen, in her

hands....

.....Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr.....

She's 10,000 times more terrifying than Hilda's lightning orb, with a killing intent super-heated like flowing magma.

"No, no....! This, that.... you can't blame me! It should be Hilda's fault!"

"It's useless to say anything now! --Windhole Cannon! Prepare for launch!"

'Guru'--'da da da'--!

Aria ran in a reverse direction from me.

The windhole this time... ah.... it's a new one!

She still has some hidden "goods"!

Once Aria reached a sufficient distance for her run-up, she turned around, looking extremely frightening.

Then, 'da da da da da da', she charged towards me at a speed faster than the current World Record for sprinting--'Pa'!!

"Fire--!!"

5 meters away from me, she twisted her body and jumped up.

This is the windhole cannon--turning one's own body into a cannon ball, and then using your head to smash into the body of your opponent.....!

And right now I'm simply a normal person.

With no way of using 'Slingshot' to make Aria perform a U-turn, I simply stood there rooted to the spot.

Like a real cannonball, Aria flew towards me in a spiraling fashion, with her head already right before my eyes.

I could see the slow-motion replay of my death scene.... behind Aria, the Sky Tree which looked very small due to the distance, was hidden from view by her spiraling twin-tails.

--To everyone in Ambulace.

When Riko is discharged from ICU.... can I make the reservations to be next?

Perhaps due to the effects of global warming, the typhoon season came and ended much earlier for this year.

Thanks to this phenomenon, there were clear skies almost everyday for autumn this year, giving rise to a fair weather season with bountiful harvests of fruits.

Several days later, I went to the cafeteria. It was stocked with melons, pears, peaches and all kinds of fruits.

(What I'm missing now is money....)

But right now, I get to to eat a big beef steak.

When lessons ended, Watson invited me to the cafeteria and gave me a treat.

She seemed to want to apologize for all the nasty things she said to me at the Sky Tree. What an honest guy.

This is my first time having beef steak... and the ones prepared in the cafeteria were really good.

Not having my lunch turned out to be a good thing.

Well, like somebody said, a meal tastes best when you're starving.

It's already 3pm, and there were hardly any students in the cafeteria. So it was very quiet, and the place had a relaxed atmosphere.

"...You should eat something as well."

I said to Watson who was sitting opposite myself, drinking only red tea.

"I've already eaten during lunch."

"As long as you feel fine.... It feels like I'm ill-treating you, having you drink only tea in front of such delicious food."

"This is a habit of mine. You don't have to mind me. English nobles always adhere to tea time, even in times of war."

"But Aria only drinks stuff when she feels like drinking."

"....Aria belongs to the Holmes family, she's probably not very receptive towards nobility training."

Watson was wearing the boy's uniform, elegantly sipping the red tea.

"I know that your arranged marriage with Aria has been... annulled. Also, I've basically heard some basic things about the situation in the Watson family."

"Wasn't she angry?"

"She said 'So I guess that's that.'. She seems very much relieved."

"That's really like Aria's style."

I rested while drinking tea that was provided for free.

"But, about that.... I'm a ...."

Although no one else was around, a blushing Watson still looked around for confirmation, before saying softly "girl".

"....I didn't say anything about this. I can't tell her. It's too embarrassing...."

"I think that's the correct thing to do. She might become overly-confused and start shooting if you told her."

After that, Watson started fidgeting and not saying anything..... So I changed the topic.

"I guess Riko is fine now. She came to school today just like usual."

"Sensei at Ambulace gave her a thorough examination. There were all sorts of detailed tests, so she has recovered completely. What's more worrying... is Hilda."

"What happened. Did her appearance worsen?"

"No. She has regained consciousness, and her body condition is slowly improving."

"Then she threw a tantrum?"

"Exactly the opposite. At first she got off the bed and tried to escape, and even bit the nurse, it was a real headache.... But after knowing she was saved because of Riko, she suddenly became obedient. She never speaks, and seems to be constantly thinking about something."

"....Anyway, let me know if she escapes. This time I'm going after her in a tank."

As I joked, I stood up from my seat.

The events on the Sky Tree--including the power outage caused by Hilda, was labelled as the 'Lightning Incident' by news reports. Although the details given by the media was vague, it was probably because Aria was involved, and the Foreign Affairs Department stepped in once again.

In preparation for the Cultural Festival, classes today were cut short.

Besides the "Cosplay Cafeteria", I didn't have anything else to do. So after finishing my late lunch, I asked Watson for a lift back to the dorm.

Having eaten my fill, I felt very energized.

But as I was going back, there's nothing for me to expend my energy on.

"Well.... Tohyama. Will a meal for lunch really be enough?"

Watson asked while driving the car.

"....What?"

"Well.... You didn't do anything to me to get your revenge. Before this I used all sorts of dirty and cunning tricks to make your life miserable. So will this be enough?"

"It's enough. You're a woman right. Exacting vengeance on women is not what a man does."

Once I finished talking, Watson's face inexplicably started turning red.

Did I answer wrongly?

I really have no clue as to what kind of answers will be the right one for women.

"But.... you still hate me right?"

"It's nothing. Using energy on hatred and pain is a waste of life."

I said as I yawned, adjusting the back of the passenger seat slightly down.

Honestly speaking, I feel that things like taking revenge is just too troublesome.

I'll leave to that the other me. This me will be taking a Hands Off policy.

"No..... No, Tohyama. You need to take some form of revenge. Or I won't be able to let go."

.....What a troublesome fellow.....

"Ahh--... I only remember grudges arising from food, but that has

been resolved today, so it's ok now."

"No no! You have to make me pay for something else, until we can call it even!"

Watson's face went red again, shaking her head side to side like a wave drum.

Hmm. What a stubborn girl.

But, you should stop fooling around now. When you move, I can smell a cinnamon-like scent.

".....What should I do then."

I had no choice but to ask.

"You can do whatever you want. You can tie me up and give me a beating. Stuff like that."

.....

"Ahh--.... You.... don't happen to have a fetish, so you...?"

"Fetish....? ......! You, you, what nonsense are you saying! You pervert! I, I, I have never thought of such shameless things! Never never!"

"Are you trying to get me killed, don't take your hands off the steering wheel!"

With the Porsche slightly weaving left and right, I felt that it was beginning to threaten my life.....

I finally got Watson, who was crying out in a weird manner, to focus on driving the car.

Watson stopped the car in a strange place.

"Get out of the car!" I obeyed and got off the car....

Opposite the yellow leaves fluttering across the sky, I could see the Selective Arts Building.

The building contained an art room, music room, calligraphy and such, all in one place. In a place like Butei High, where tastes for the arts have no connection whatsoever, there was no sign of anyone. It was a place almost perpetually free of human habitation.

It's the same today, despite Watson inviting me here to this place. The hall of the building was empty.

"What are we doing here."

"Well... Tohyama, I may be the type of person who has become shameless from doing bad things... But actually... I have a request for you."

"A request for me?"

After making sneak glances around the empty building again, Watson tilted her head and said--

"I hope you can keep it a secret."

Blushing, she brought her palms together, as if praying to me.

"What secret."

"I hope.... you won't tell anyone else about the fact that I'm a girl....!"

With some effort, Watson raised her head to look at me, her eyes wet.

So this is why she keeps forcing me to take revenge on her.

In any case, she wants to use that as a form of payment to keep my mouth sealed.

Then I should say it. After all, there's no civil agreement on 'calling it even'.

(Even though I never intended to spread the information around....)

But since she became so meek.... it made me felt like bullying her

for a bit.

"Hmm, what to do."

The moment I struck a fake pose of thinking about it, Watson immediately straightened her back.

Clasping both hands and bringing them up and down, she said

"Please, please, please don't tell anyone! I will announce it to everyone in school eventually, but it's still too early for me now....! I'm not ready with my preparations to appear publicly as a girl."

The panicking Watson... even the normal me understood.

--Is really cute.

So far until now, she's a type of girl that has never appeared around me.

She looks just like a boy, and for a misogynist like me, is therefore a girl whom I can hold a proper conversation with.

But.... this guy may turn out to be a surprisingly dangerous existence as well.

"....."

Becoming somewhat wrong-footed, I didn't say anything, so Watson's expression became even more grim.

She suddenly turned around and left the hall, walking towards the Porsche parked along the side of the road.

Then, after taking a large paper bag from the boot of the car, she ran back.

"Hey, hey. Where are we going?"

I asked, as Watson grabbed my wrist and forcefully dragged me to the Art Preparation Room on the 2nd floor in silence.

Pulling me in along, Watson went inside the preparation room. The

preparation room was filled with plaster figures used as models for sketching, and painting canvases of all sizes. The actual art room was empty.

The curtains were drawn, so it was a bit dark... Click.

Watson locked the door.

"Hey....!"

What's, what's up?

Watson took off her jacket, removing her tie, she's taking off her clothes!

Then--

With her back facing me, she even removed her belt and took off her shoes.

"Look... look away!"

Watson said.

"--!"

She pulled down her zip, and removed the pants in one breath!

Because all this time I had treated her as a boy, I had gotten careless. My reactions were delayed.

Although I swiftly turned away... but for an instant I saw it.

Pure, pure white bloomers.

Watson, why are you wearing bloomers there.

Ah, no, that--I understand, due to the structure of your lower body, that's more suitable. But if you're disguising yourself then you should be more thorough!

(Damn, Damn it....!)

The image of her bottom enveloped by the pure white bloomers became seared into my mind.

The smooth curves, symmetrical like a peach--the butt.

That's definitely a body curvature only girls have.

No no, Kinji--now isn't the time to be analyzing this!

(I must get out of here quickly....!)

Forcing myself to come back to my senses, I hurriedly ran towards the door. Whoosh!

A matte black knife flew out from behind me, piercing straight into the door lock. That's dangerous!

"--No running! The one who should.. should be running away is me!"

"Then you should escape quickly! Watson, what are you planning to do!"

'Ka-chik Ka-chik' Twisting the door knob only created noise. Even though it was damaged, but I couldn't open it.

Forming a prayer in my heart, I rested my forehead against the door, confirming my bloodflow.

Not... not good. Danger. It's at amber alert now.

The seared image was still playing in my mind, whatever it is, I have to forget about the underwear first--and force the beautiful thighs seen along with it out of my mind as well.

Those legs well and truly belong to a girl.

No wonder its a body with 27% body fat. Soft and tender, with a smooth and glossy feel, emitting the sparkle of moisture.... Her skin was sheer like silk, and smooth like milk.

But.. But.....!

Calm down Kinji. There's nothing extraordinary about thighs. If you think about it clearly, aren't the girls in Butei High always showing their thighs.

There's nothing to be afraid of, there's nothing to be afraid of. Yes... nothing to be afraid of.....

"Look at me, Tohyama!"

Just as I was trying very hard to perform self suggestion, Watson had to call out to me.

"--Don't be silly! I refuse!"

"I'll attack you if you don't look at me!"

"....!"

Although I was on the verge of entering Hysteria mode--but I haven't changed yet.

If we were to fight now, I'll definitely collapse from the first blow.

"......."

I fearfully turned my head while standing in front of the door.

"......!"

Bang!

My back hit the door while trying to back away.

Although Watson told me to look at her, but her back was still facing me--

She has already taken off her white shirt, and have undone the bandage-like cloth binding around her chest. The soft and delicate frame of her back increased yet another image into my mind.

Her porcelain skin carried an air of nobility, vivid and brilliant like what you see in manga.

"My father--had me raised and nurtured as a boy. When I was little, if any of my actions were feminine in any slightest way, I'd be punished severely."

Watson described her past with her back facing me, while I had my mouth open and was tongue tied.

"So I had to forget that I am a woman. But... starting from around 13, 14 years old.... every time I see novels or movies describing romance, I would project my own feelings and emotions into the female characters... Indeed, I'm still aware that I'm a woman."

Rustle, rustle.

Watson turned towards me, and from the paper bag beside her feet...

Took out a pure white bra and placed it on her chest.

"Uhn.... Uhn...."

Perhaps being unaccustomed to this, she took quite long to secure the small hooks behind the bra.

"... I carried a yearning for women clothes, and occasionally will hide from my father the fact that I wanted to pose girl-like actions in front of mirrors. But... I couldn't do it. Every time I tried to do it, the shadows from my youth would surface. I'm still very afraid. As for appearing in front of people in women clothes..."

Finished wearing the bra, Watson "Sssss---", "Fuuu----"started taking in deep breaths--

She appeared to have her mind set on something as she walked towards me.

".....!"

--A girl. --She's really a girl.

Watson adjusted her bra cup carelessly, and as if I was trying to verify something, I looked at her--within that thin piece of cloth

were her slightly protruding breasts.

The shape was not too big and not too small, and well proportioned for both left and right breasts, the external appearance was a beautiful bowl shape.

They weren't flat like Aria's, nor were they huge like Shirayuki's.

It's a very suitable size for female high school students.

Looking at it was like looking at a dazzling display of precious gems.

From her breasts to her attractive navel, all the way down to the lower half of her body, there were no excess meat on her body. Her hands and legs were very long as well, and her body proportions were just right.

She was like one of the sketch models in the art room. Allowing people to feel a healthy kind of beauty, and absolutely not have anyone feel odd or disgusted.

Maybe because of this reason, even though I'm aware that I was dangerously on the verge of entering Hysteria mode, but it was nothing like the feeling of dread caused by Riko, Shirayuki and the others when they are forcing themselves on me. Furthermore, she had boyish short hair as well.

It feels--like I can still control it. I must work hard....!

"First time meeting you... I can say this right. This is the real me. I haven't stood in front of anyone as a girl. You're the first."

Watson was extremely nervous herself, her skin--was slowing turning pink.

But, even though you're very manly (but actually a woman) to show off your bra, but please don't come any closer.

Very good. Just stop there.

"If you want to tell everyone that I'm a woman--then I better

become a woman as early as possible."

"....?"

"The reason I am unable to show myself in front of people in women's clothes is due to psychological stress. So we can use shock therapy to overcome it. You'll have to do it. And I can repay you with these kinds of actions."

"Shock therapy...? What's that."

"It's... those.. things that you'll do to make me feel like I'm a woman. Those--things that will make me painfully aware that I'm a woman..... I, I'm a noble, so I can't show it directly.... You'll just have to do to me the things you usually do to girls.... do, do it!"

.....?

.....?

I don't get it....!

"This way, I will become aware. I will revert back to being a girl. For this.... I must personally experience that I'm a woman. So you... let me, become a woman!""

"You say become a woman.... but you have always been a woman!"

"Haven't you been listening to a single word I said!?"

"I heard! I've been listening, right in front of your eyes!"

Wanting a quick and early release, I spoke in a rage--

Watson pressed her raspberry colour lips tightly, her expression becoming serious.

"Tohyama.... Is it because you care about how I feel? It's.... all right. Although it's a bad time to say this now, but... that night, I felt... I, if it was you--I wouldn't mind. You can do it."

Suddenly, Watson's voice was mixed with something very

feminine--I started to back away.

I... I can do what.

The both of us once fought tooth and nail against each other.

"Even if you don't know the details, I think you'll be able find out how relying on your natural instincts along the way. Leave the specific instructions to me, I've seen the medical books. Basic know-how is available there."

Ri.... Ridiculous.

The shock therapy to turn Watson into a girl, actually includes compensation for me.

She seems to want me to do something which can kill two birds with one stone....

Judging from how she has been showing me so much skin and from her words--it seems to be some form of medical procedure--but am I a doctor?

"So what now. Tohyama. As a man, are you scared?"

"No, no. Rather than scared.... I don't get it. What is it you are trying to tell me?"

"You.. you don't understand?! I've already done all this....!"

Watson's indomitable eyes widened into circles from shock.

"I've only allowed you, because it's you... to see me like this. Even so, you still have no idea?"

"....."

Watson looked at the speechless me in shock, she then sighed deeply.

" 'Not eating meat already at the mouth is the shame of a man'[6]. Japan seems to have this idiom as well.... But for you, not only do

you not eat the meat already at your mouth, you're a man who doesn't even eat the meat being willingly fed to you by others. It seems that it's obvious your relationship with so many girls is in name only, and you've never made any progress with a single one of them."

What a busybody.

Is this guy sick?

Why must I go out with girls and achieve progress with them!

"If so, then we don't have to do shock therapy, let's switch to training."

"Training....?"

While I was still in the state of confusion, Watson changed the topic.

"Yes. It's.... I'll use you for 'Woman Training'. I think you need 'Man Training' as well, so you can use me for the training. Fortunately we're friends of the opposite sex, so we can use each other for this training. That aside, until the training is over, you must keep the secret that I'm actually a girl. What do you say?"

Whatever. I have no intention of telling anyone anyway.... Watson started taking out the sailor uniform for the "Cosplay Cafeteria".

Excellent. She seems to be putting on the clothes.

Please continue doing so!

"Ye.. yeah. Let's begin the training."

Whatever it is I'll just nod my head in agreement first, so she will continue putting clothes back on.

"I brought the uniform along because I felt it could be of use during the shock therapy. Looks like my decision was correct."

She started putting on her skirt.

Very good.

The biggest crisis of the day seems to be past me now.

"From now on I'll occasionally carry out the 'Woman Training' and your 'Man Training' here. Although we're of the opposite sex, but we'll probably get along fine. But this will be a secret between the both of us."

Watson suddenly extended her finger and pointed it at me....

As Watson is a bishoujo with an extremely boyish appearance, so once she wore her clothes properly--the urge to resist reduced substantially.

It's just like what she said, she isn't like a girl--this includes the way she talks and her mannerisms.

If this was a horse race to compare how womanly they are, then compared to Aria, who is at least 10 horses length behind Shirayuki and Riko, Watson is even further behind.

With her looking like a bishounen wearing a sailor uniform, it made me felt calm like I was in the presence of another male.

Maybe she's really the type among girls who I can best get along with--

In terms of safety for Hysteria mode.

"Ah, regardless--I understand when you say we can get along. But, what's your so-called training."

"Oh yes.... then Tohyama. Right now, this place shall be an open field in Spring time."

"Huh?"

What... is she talking about?

"Look. The dandelions has bloomed. It's beautiful. Ah ha ha."

Watson pointed at the floor as if acting.

Was it me, or did her smile just now seemed very feminine. But it felt a bit childish though.

"Is.. is there something wrong with you, Watson."

I asked worriedly. BOP!!

Watson swung a short hook at my lower jaw.

"You're the one with a problem! This is character simulation! You should know this even if you're a Butei! Here I'm playing a girl, and you're supposed to be a boy interacting with the me playing a girl!"

"Girls don't unreservedly throw such perfect short hooks! Plus, since I'm a boy, then--what am I supposed to do. You teach me."

"Huh?!"

"Don't 'huh' me. I have no problems with the character simulation, you demonstrate first."

Character simulation--refers to having a few people act out different roles in a setting, of which the purpose is to be able to play out such scenarios when encountered in real life.

To put bluntly, it's like a game. However, it's able to unexpectedly yield positive results when put into use before any infiltration missions to obtain evidence.

As such, it has become a compulsory subject for Informa, CVR and so on in Butei High.

"It's, that's.... well, it's to be able to naturally get closer as a man and woman."

"I have no way of behaving naturally when alone with girls. How should we go about doing this? I can do the simulation, but you have to give me a direction."

"Well, I've already said--you be the man, and interact with the me as

a girl, and... love me."

"Lo... love... this is insane..."

"If you don't love me, I'll get angry!"

Watson said with her face reddened. I can feel she's starting to get angry. What a hot-headed person.

However, in the short time we've fought before, I could tell that she knows boxing.

And her boxing skills are far beyond amateur level competitors.

Even professional boxers can't let down their guard against her. In order not to infuriate her, I'll have to make up something on the spot.

"Well.... let's not set it at an open field. It's too unexpected. It's difficult to simulate outdoor actions while in an actual indoor setting."

"That's true. Then, then let's set this place as my room."

"This is more like it, but I don't know the layout of your room."

"A rough impression will do. There's a table here, and because there's only one dressing chair here, so when Grandmother comes over--it can't be helped, the two of us can only sit on the bed. This will be the bed. Tohyama, come, sit beside me."

Watson sat on a stack of canvas sheets about 60 cm thick.

"....."

You.... really were raised as a boy.

What setting is this.

Although it's a character simulation, but there's actually a girl bringing a boy to her room, and both of them are sitting on the bed.

She obviously hasn't realized the seriousness of the situation.

"Well, it should be ok like this."

But as I didn't want to be beaten up, I had no choice but to sit down.

The canvas sheets made a poof sound as it was pressed down, it was really like sitting on an actual bed.

Hearing the sound, Watson suddenly became somewhat alarmed.

Through the sound, she seemed to start thinking about the present situation, and instantly realized there was something wrong with the setting.

"....."

Sitting with her legs slightly open, Watson hurriedly closed up her legs, using her hands to defensively grip the ends of her skirt.

Holding on to the edge of the canvas sheet, she started becoming so rigid she couldn't speak...

"....."

Without an opportunity to speak I became silent as well.

This is getting bad again.

....It's too realistic.

Although I don't have any practical experience with this kind of things, but when actually in a girl's room--if the boy and girl are in this situation, both of them will become quiet.

"Toh... Tohyama. Say something! Something natural and manly."

Watson, who was directing just now, looked to me for help now that she's in a predicament.

I became very angry at her irresponsible way of acting.

"... If you want me to act like a man, then you must talk like a girl as well!"

I reminded Watson, who had not immersed herself fully into the character simulation since just now.

"Li.. like a girl? Then I'll start with addressing myself in the fir... first person. If I say 'Atashi'[7]. it'll be a bit too much."

".... I think I'll use 'boku'[8] to address myself, there are some girls who do this."

"Sit... sitting with a boy on... on a bed... just.. just like a girl...."

Watson was mumbling, like trying to give hints to herself.....

Even in the slight darkness of the room I could see she was completely red from head to toe. Drip, drip. She was starting to sweat.

".... Toh... Tohyama. You, you say something."

Watson was still somewhat afraid. She was trembling lightly as she spoke using a girl's manner of speech--

Maybe it was due to her manner of speech, but I suddenly felt a girl has appeared. No, she's a girl in actual fact.

(....Not good.....)

I've said unnecessary things.

Just thinking that she's a girl, I felt that she has become unusually cute. This is getting bad.....

Even though I know we are doing character simulation, but now it seems that I'm really sitting on a bed with a girl.

".....Eve.. even if you ask me to say something, I don't really have much to talk about...."

"Then, why did you come here, to my room...."

"Why I came... you, you asked me to..."

"I.. I did not! Don't put it in such a vulgar manner! It's embarrassing."

Watson lowered her head, the fringe on her forehead moving slightly. I could smell a slight cinnamon scent from Watson whose eyes were now closed.

(Not.. not good.....!)

Regardless whether it's perfume or something else, it just smells too nice.

As it isn't like the fragrance of Aria's gardenia scent, Shirayuki's sandalwood scent, Riko's vanilla scent and Reki's mint scent, so I got careless for the moment. Now I have unexpectedly breathed in large amounts of this fragrant scent.

Ba-dum.... My blood flow was beginning to increase to dangerous levels.

However, it was until now that I noticed--I have very low immunity towards the scent of girls. Maybe it's because my sense of smell is better than most people. Don't tell me I'm a dog.

"It's.. it's still a bit early, no matter what... let's do it quickly!"

I--I'm really--a HUGE IDIOT!!

Why did I have to make a mistake here! Plus it's the lethal kind!

As Watson seem to be having a hard time, and this place was very secluded, so I wanted to end this character simulation as soon as possible. Originally I wanted to say 'Let's go quickly".... but I actually said "Let's do it quickly" instead!!

--Do what!?

Raising her head with a questioning expression on her face, Watson's eyes just happened to meet my eyes while I was in a state of panic.

Fwoosh!!

Due to the both of us shifting our bodies in a fluster, the canvas sheets which were already stacked unsteadily collapsed backwards.

"Kyaaaa!!"

Shocked, Watson emitted a girl-like scream.

"Oh.....!"

Afraid that Watson will hit the large canvas sheets if she fell along with it, I extended my hand, to allow her to lower her body as I shielded her.

"!"

"....!"

How did things turn out this way....!?

I was holding Watson's head, and she was hugging my body tightly.

We had finally put the "procedures to take when about to fall" lessons learned in Assault to actual use.

In the crook of my arm, Watson lifted her eyes and stared at me....

Watson.....

"--Pffff--"

I suddenly laughed out.

You look so cute. Little kitten.

" 'Do to me the things you usually do to girls'--Watson, you definitely said that just now."

".....! It's, it's fine. Even if we switch to shock therapy now....! I was raised as a boy, so I have a high tolerance level. You can do whatever you want..."

"Then--so be it."

Facing me who had changed drastically in the look in my eyes and my manner of speaking--

Watson closed both eyes shut, and as if in a dream, was mumbling "Together with a man, becoming a woman with a man..."

Haha, you're really like a woman like this. Very womanly.

"Ah, ah, I'm so nervous, so excited, my heart is going to jump out of my throat....! I'm becoming.... a girl... becoming.... Tohyama's.... woman!"

I gently carried Watson up, whose words carried some fear in it.

"Elle Watson. Allow me to teach you one thing."

".....?"

Sitting back on the canvas sheets, Watson stared at me blankly with wide eyes.

"The things usually done to girls--is to be gentle."

Getting off the canvas sheets, I smiled as I told Watson.

Imitating the western etiquette seen in movies--I knelt on one knee.

"Although Elle has proposed an excellent invitation, but being rough on ladies whom are frightened is not allowed."

Suddenly being addressed by her first name, Watson had a startled expression. I could almost hear the sound of her heart beating.

Or to put it more accurately, I did hear it--using my ears in Hysteria mode.

"How, how rude! I, I wasn't scared!"

Being a bit rude, I looked at Watson's knees as she stood in front of me...

They were shaking. I gave a wry smile.

It's really too forced.

"We shall end here today. Training needs to be carried out in stages. If we progress too fast, it won't be good for the bodies of both parties."

"But, if it's like this, my compensation for you...."

"Elle. You have to be more beautiful than the sculptures of goddesses in the arts room."

"... You, you, all of a sudden, what... what are you saying....! Don't make fun of me...!"

"Did I look like I was making fun of you? Elle is very beautiful."

As I looked at Watson sincerely, her hands were pressing on her chest in shock.

"Me, me... beau.. beautiful....!? This is the first time in my life someone has said that to me...."

"Elle, you have let me seen your beautiful figure, so for my compensation--that alone will be sufficient."

As if by accident, I touched Watson's shoulder. To calm her down further, I gently caressed her head.

This--what's this beating sound coming from Watson's heart.

Even in Hysteria mode, there are still many things regarding the female body that I don't understand.

"And, I'm very happy you told me that 'I can do anything I want'--"

While narrating praises is a natural instinct of mine, but the statement just now, was astonishing even for myself.

"It's good... that.. you're hap.. happy. Then...."

Watson was finally ending the training as well....

As she held the boy's uniform which she took off just now in her hands, I silently back-faced her.

"To, today we shall end here. From now on when you have the desire, come look for me for practice. It doesn't matter if it's after school or during lessons. As long as it's a place with no one else around. If you feel up to it... we can proceed into shock therapy from training too."

"Ok, ok" I agreed wryly until Watson was done talking.

Once the mood started to ease slightly--

"Tohyama... in order not to ruin the mood just now, I've kept this matter towards the end.... The 'Far Eastern War'--"

The term made my gaze sharpened instantly.

--Far Eastern War

Proceeding behind the back of the entire world--the invisible war between "Deen" and "Grenada".

So this is what she wanted to talk about.

"The battles from now on will only intensify. Because you chose 'Deen', you have chosen a path with a tough road ahead.

Even if I want to go on the run.....

I have already joined the battle.

Because it's already a fact that I defeated Hilda who was in "Grenada".

".... I'm used to dealing with all sorts of problems."

I hardened my resolve and answered.

Hearing my words, Watson's hands, which were in the midst of putting the uniform back on, came to a pause. After a moment, she said:

"Liberty Mason will take the side of "Deen". This is the Council's--decision. From now on I will be on your side as well."

"It will be very dependable with you around."

For a very long time I have always hoped to have a Butei from the medical faculty as a companion.

That's because we get injured frequently.

--Butei in the medical faculty are split into Ambulace and Medica, Tokyo Butei High has set up separate departments for Ambulace and Medica to carry out their own separate training.

Ambulace focuses on coming up with treatments for wounded personnel admitted into Butei Hospital, and Medica carries out emergency aid and rescue at the scene of the incident... To make a comparison, students in Ambulace play the roles of doctors and nurses, while students in Medica play the roles of paramedics and first-aiders.

Once a companion has fallen, even in situations with gun battles playing out, a medical Butei must rush to that person's side. As such, they are required to have high levels of fighting techniques--that's definitely nothing to nitpick about with Watson.

It's just that....

"But the application for teams in Butei High has already ended. There will be some difficulties with Elle joining Team Baskerville. I guess you should know that the IADA follows their doctrine very

strictly. Once a team has been formed, unless a member is KIA or resigns, resulting in a shortfall of numbers, we're not allowed to switch members. Although Elle can be employed as external support, but the fees for Medical Butei are quite substantial--"

"--I have already received my fee."

"......?"

"I have collected Hilda's wings and tissues of Hilda's Demon Entrails. All first-rate materials in a demon's armament. As long as you give me these, I can sign a 1 year support contract with you.

Those things which are useless to me, well, if Watson feels that it's alright...

I can obtain invaluable strength.

"Then we are in your hands. From now on you'll be the Medical Butei for Team Baskerville."

"--It's a deal. Send me the Contract once it's marked with Baskerville's stamp. And.... while treating Hilda, I recovered an item. She was hiding it."

Saying this, Watson poked me in the shoulder, I turned around--

Watson, already dressed in the male uniform, was holding a small box.

She opened the box--inside was a small gemstone.

It looks like a ruby... except it's dark red.

"This is the crystallized 'Golden Shell'--one of the seven stars. Tamamo will be coming back very soon, so I think we can place this back in Aria's body then.

--Golden Shell.

It's used to block all contact between the Hihiirokane and the human heart.

There's 2 in Aria's chest now, if we have 4 more.....

Aria will become what Tamamo had said, no longer an existence that will bring forth terror.

But, the 4 stars have been taken by "Grenada".

I must get them back. No matter how--

4th Ammo: Cultural Festival Day 1 -Carnaval Via-

Another few days have passed--October 30th.

Butei High's cultural festival for this year has started.

Coming out from the dorm, you can see that the sidewalks of the Academy Island had become a pedestrian paradise, full of people from outside the school.

Both sides of the roads were set up with all kinds of shops, even people from Assault and Dagula opened up to everyone else in a calm manner.

(..... All the dangerous items have been stored underground.)

During preparations for the cultural festival, there will be a massive clean up, adjustments will also be made for the decoration of the facilities.

This is due to the fact that interviews will be taking place during the cultural festival, and to avoid leaving negative impressions on the parents of special elementary and middle school students with an interest in enrolling into Butei High, these preparations beforehand are absolutely necessary.

Just that, all these troublesome work are the responsibility of the First Years.

The internal ranking system in Butei High is as strict as those in the military.

In Butei High, there are even words like these being spread around: First Years are slaves, Second Years are demons, Third Years are the Kings of Hell.....

Last year, I had no choice but to constantly pick up empty

cartridges in Assault as well.

(The cultural festival lasts for two days.... The mission for this year is only the Cosplay Cafeteria for today, and tomorrow should be free activity.)

Strolling in the school grounds, from a distance I could see promotional posters for the cultural festival pasted all over the place.

These promotional posters were collected from students in Butei High.

There were oil paintings, illustration-styled drawings, strong graphics created by computers.... more than several dozen of different styles.

(Every one of them is pretty well done....)

There are serial numbers marked on each promotional drawing, and observers can vote using their cellphones, appraising the promotional drawings through their votes.

When the drawings were being collected, Jeanne immediately rushed over upon hearing the news, giving me quite a scare.

"Even though I know I can win, but I should still draw one and participate."

Although this is what Jeanne the artist said, her face was simply overflowing with the desire to create.

"If you say you know you can win and still participate, then that's just too childish."

Using such reasons, I managed to convince her not to participate in the competition--that was close!

If Jeanne's horrific-beyond-imagination drawing was publicly displayed, the public might suffer mental trauma, and if things worsened we might even be sued in court.

That's right. This is part of my job as a Butei--"To avert a disaster before it begins", dealing with the problem without anyone else knowing.

(.... If I report this to the Masters, maybe I can get an academic credit?)

As I thought about it seriously, I walked along the school grounds that were filled with a festive mood.

In a warehouse belonging to Logi, children were gathered together, sitting on the pilot's seat in a helicopter.

The Snipe's Airgun shooting corner and the SSR's Museum of Ancient History were attracting large crowds as well.

The musical performed by CVR has been renowned for a very long time, with even professionals in the industry admitting to being inferior. On the day of the musical, long queues snaked before the ticketing booths. It was probably because CVR has quite a number of beautiful young girls, the absurdly highly-priced tickets were sold out in a flash.

The cafeteria where students usually leave a mess all over after eating, was wiped clean for the "Cosplay Cafeteria" that will be held in the morning today.

During the Cosplay Cafeteria, the training results of the students carrying out their missions to infiltrate and search for evidence would be clearly shown. As such, if successful, it seems that the Masters will give an "Outstanding" grade in the internal reports for the students involved in the activity.

For a problem student like me who worries constantly about academic credits, this is a job worth doing seriously.

But....

"Welcome!"

A girl's voice came from outside.

Ranbyou, who had come to check on the results of the cosplay, ordered me to work in the kitchen.

"There's no police officer with such a gloomy look in his eyes."

Waving her fists, she uttered her judgement--but I must disagree.

Things like the look in one's eyes are due to what a person is born with, it can't be changed that easily. Ranbyou-san.

Recently, as friends in Informa had told me... One day I will expose the fact that you registered an account for yourself on a social website for making friends, and even gave yourself an online name called "Ranran". And you still have the cheek to write that you like reading books in your personal information column. Besides books on gambling tips and gossip magazines, I've never seen you touch any other type of printed media. And you actually wrote down age as 18.

If you look at the face alone, she's really beautiful, so there are actually victims who have been deceived by her attractive external appearance and dated the female gorilla. I must meet out the justice of heaven.

... Thinking about this, I was stirring the stewed vegetables in the pot, feeling very depressed.

"The fire's too small!"

Wearing a fireman uniform, Muto was mumbling as he fidgeted with the sides of the pot.

Hearing this, Ranbyou shouted, "Firemen risk their lives in their work, how can there be such a chatty fellow!", and at the same time, kicked Muto almost 3 meters away.

Speaking of which, doesn't the school already have kitchen staff in the first place? There's no need for everyone to change costumes in the first place at all.

This school has very poor planning.

With pent-up grudges and dissatisfaction in me, I spent another hour making stewed vegetables and pasta.

Coming in for the afternoon shift, Hiraga who was a girl, was caught by Ranbyou with one hand and swung in a circle in mid-air.

The angry looking Hiraga had her feet twisted in an impossible direction, her tendon had probably been injured by Ranbyou. Our violent teacher does not go easy on anyone, including girls.

"What the hell, Hiraga--anyone is stronger than you, can you at least increase your height somewhat?"

"Aiya, aiyaya!"

As Ranbyou was saying such offensive words, she placed Hiraga into an empty pot, then looked around at me and Muto.

"Come to think of it, two people will be enough for the kitchen. So, who goes to the mess hall...."

While Muto was tugging away at Hiraga's shiny skirt to drag her out from the pot, I made use of the opportunity to open my mouth and talk.

"Sensei, I, no, this Police Officer has deeply reflected on his past actions while in the kitchen, and will never be **lazy** [9] again."

Speaking softly to her, I intentionally added in Ranbyou's online name.

Following my conversation, Ranbyou, who was facing in the direction of Muto suddenly froze.

Like suddenly pressing a 'Pause' button, even her huge ponytail was frozen as well.

"....."

With her mouth in a 'へ' shape, Ranbyou turned her head around, sweat beads the size of beans forming on her forehead.

Although there is no conclusive evidence, but.... Tohyama wouldn't have known my secret right....? Ranbyou's face reflected an anxious expression.

This... this seems promising. Time to change topic, and probe her once more time.

"Add.. adding on, this Officer has a 19 year elder brother. Although he's very strict, but he's very good looking."

Drawing her attention with these words, Ranbyou, who had written in her self-introduction column "Types that I like: Strong, forceful types"--managed to maintain her dignity as a teacher, her mouth remaining in the shape of 'へ' without much change.....

But, she seemed to be somewhat happy, the corners of her mouth slowly rising, finally forming the shape of a 'W'.

Ranbyou was flashing a smile like a leopard[10].

Mmm. Actually you did see my Nii-san before, just that, my Nii-san appeared in the form of a girl.

"Then... Muto and Hiraga will be a team. It might be better to adjust the style of the people working together. Tohyama! Go to mess hall!"

--This is great, even though I sacrificed Nii-san, but at least I got away from the female panther for now.

Looking at me with a vacant expression on their faces, I bowed to Muto and Hiraga...

Although it was somewhat dishonorable, but at least I successfully escaped from the kitchen.

....--When I walked into the hall with the posture of a police officer, the busy scene was like that of a hurricane.

The tables and chairs of the Cosplay Cafeteria were set all the way to the courtyard, with second year students in various uniforms shuttling back and forth at all corners.

"....Guh..."

Managing the affairs in the mess hall, the girls will always be drawing a lot of attention. It was really an impossible situation.

The costumes of the girls were resplendent, and an atmosphere of a cosplay coffee shop was pervading the mess hall.

The male customers seemed to be very happy.... maybe because they still have no idea how fierce the girls of Butei High are.

For the normal boys, they probably view this as a simple affair of being waited upon by service staff, being able to be served food by a cosplaying female high school student was already an enjoyable affair by itself.

But, if those girls are hired by your competitors, they might end up sending you bullets and explosives instead.

And those will be lighted.

(.....Ignorance is bliss for these people....)

As I thought about it, I delivered fried rice and cola all over the place, brushing shoulders with the people that I usually know.

There's Shiranui wearing a pilot uniform, whose wish is to become an idol for middle-aged ladies.

There's Nakasorachi, who was wearing the white lab coat of a chemist research facility staff and serving honeydew melon soda to the customers. Her clothes were in a disarray, with her soft breasts barely contained by her lacy clothes.....

Not good, it seems like she can't really work on the job.

Firstly, she should be wearing contact lens for her poor vision, but she's still bumping into walls.

She was responsible for the taking, repeating and listing orders, but due to some reason, her face turned red when our eyes meet, resulting in her accidentally tripping over a foot.

What's more baffling is, in the process of falling, the tray she was holding in her hands forcefully smacked into her own face. It seems to be all my fault, but it looks like she's really not suitable for this kind of work.....

I helped Nakasorachi onto her feet, and thinking of letting her rest for a while, I brought her out of the mess hall.

The straight path leading out from the mess hall was turned into a

ramp using plywood, becoming an unobstructed route.

... Hey hey. Nakasorachi.

I say, because you fell down just now, your super short mini-skirt has been lifted to dangerous heights.

But, just as I was about to point this out, I suddenly developed a fearful panic of seeing her exposed well-developed thighs due to the fact that her clothes were in a mess, and as a result I couldn't say anything

Wrapped up in my own fear, I brought Nakasorachi to a place which couldn't be seen from the mess hall...

"Oto... Otoko-yama-kun[11]... As a wait... waitress, I'm always a failure... sorry! It's all my... my blunder, I'm a stupid, useless tort... tortoise. A tortoise will always be a tortoise!"

She started smoothing the long bangs at her forehead and sobbing, and just like what she said, completely became negative about herself.

For her, besides being a communications operator, she probably takes only types of work like being a librarian. Requiring her to become a waitress dressed up as a race queen is simply too challenging.

I really wanted to push her into the kitchen so that a poor fireman could be rescued, but the male customers seemed to really fancy types like Nakasorachi, so I guess Ranbyou will never agree.

As the Cosplay Cafeteria will be assessed by the Masters once the cultural festival is over--

And if the results of their assessment is not ideal, according to regulations, all student participants will be graded badly in their internal report.

So, if a black sheep appears, then my grades will be implicated as well. Looks like I must act.

"It's alright. Don't let Ranbyou see you, rest for a while. I'll deal with the work."

Thinking and looking out for her, I led Nakasorachi towards the direction of the lounge....

"Ai ai! It's no wonder you're Ki-kun the Flagship Architect! You're now taking on the Nakasorachi route!"

Wearing the costume which she had wanted, turning into a "Western Gun-slinger", the extremely late but highly-regarded-by-Ranbyou Riko was walking towards us.

Riko certainly looked the part of an American from those times, using her thumb and pointing at us. Truly accomplished acting.

After being discharged from the hospital, Riko returned to school as usual.

Her attitude towards us remained the same as well... as if the battle on the Sky Tree never took place.

Although Riko only knows how to create problems, but without her around, things get kind of lonely.

Honestly speaking, I'm really happy she has returned in good health....

"Ki-kun is really an accomplished skirt-chaser, Riko is relieved."

"Speak properly, and speaking of which you've been skipping too many classes. Nakasorachi can't be a waitress now, so we'll continue with her work."

"OK! But she looks like she's pretty scheming, would it be all right if I leave you alone with her? Woah--woah--could this be an act by a baka-girl?"

As Riko snickered, she pointed grudgingly at Nakasorachi's skirt.

"Mine.. Mine-san. This.. this... isn't what it looks like. I did not have that kind of intention! But... but if this can make Tohyama-kun....

have a better impression of me... But.. but that's too blatant as well!"

Jumping away from beside me, Nakasorachi hurriedly adjusted her super mini-skirt which was lifted high up.

Nakasorachi. If you had really noticed, why didn't you adjust your skirt before this.

Luckily I kept looking up with my eyes. or it'd have been dangerous.

"But Ki-kun, you should still start with the Aria route first. Riko supports Ki-kun and Aria. So you and Riko including this girl should just maintain a physical relationship. Bang～"

"....Huh....?"

Riko closed her eyes to a slit, and mimicked a shot at me with her index finger....

.....POOOOOOOOOOM.....

Following a waft of light gardenia scent, came a magma-like aura from behind me....

"........"

The scenery before my eyes suddenly turned upside down.

A big 180 degrees turn.

In the Up-Down direction.

An unknown hand had grabbed my belt and shirt, turning me entirely around.

"You--lecherous Kinji! What's a phy.. physical relationship! Not only Riko, but even that communications operation kid as well.... You.. what have you done! Have you really been working as a waiter!?"

The judgement has been passed--

The one holding me from behind in an awkward head-down

position, was Aria in her elementary school student outfit.

"No.... I didn't do anyth--!"

"Ah ah?"

Aria emitted a sound like that of an anxious lion cub, and with a 'swoosh', stopped momentarily in mid-air while holding onto me.

"--Windhole Trap!"

BANG!!!

Along with my police cap, my entire head up to my lower jaw was buried in the plywood ramp.

Fortunately the plywood was very thin, allowing me to escape from the brink of death...

Using a finishing move on me while I was in a difficult position, this was adding insult to injury.

Woah woah! A fourth year elementary school girl performing a pile-driver on a police officer! This scene can only be seen in Butei High!

Toh.. Toh.. Toh-chan! Yama-chan! Look... looking at it in reverse, it looks like you've been on a guillotine!

It's Riko and Nakasorachi....

The muffled sounds of their voices came from above the plywood.

With my head finally plucked out, I lay suffering on the ground and looked upwards--

".....!"

This time it has turned into a situation where I was down-slope and looking up at Aria's short skirt.

I'm now caught in a position of a pervert whom should be arrested by the police in the first place.

"--!"

Above that slender leg which looks like it still belongs to an elementary school student--sh.. shit!

This is a bad angle!

I lowered my head by a centimeter, having witnessed the scene, I felt that my blood flow seemed to have almost changed into Hysteria mode.

"You... you...! Even in this situation...!"

Even Aria seemed to feel that I was thinking "So lucky, I actually saw it (laughs)", the veins on her temple showing.

"Woah woah! Aria just turned eight! You've seen everything!"

"--Fourth year elementary school students are ten years old!"

"Aiya! It's really the Battle of Waterloo! Ki-kun, lower your head!"

Bam! Riko jumped up forcefully--

"Swoosh!"

Wearing her cowboy jeans, she aimed for my back and sat down.

Pressed down by her body weight, my head lowered.

Look carefully Riko. If you look properly, I have already gotten used to Hysteria mode long ago.

This is for the battles with "Grenada" from now on.

(Should I fight.....!)

If I enter Hysteria mode now, a tragedy will definitely occur before I achieve victory. Now that the three of us are alone in the lounge which hardly anyone comes by, the moment Hysteria mode gets activated will be certainly be an earth shaking event. If that's the case, the innocent Nakasorachi will become a victim as well.

I took a defensive approach--

Lowering my head, trying my best not to look between Aria's legs.

But using the concept of riding a camel on its back, Riko used both her hands on my lower jaw to forcefully lift it up. Not.. not bad.

You've let me witnessed the variety of Chinese martial arts techniques.

This time, with Aria in the "full exposure" angle--

"--Windhole Memory Destroyer!"

--She brought her foot down hard. (--!)

God has appeared.

In the gap where Aria has lifted her shoe up, a miraculous angle that could have only been due to the protection of gods appeared--

From my line of sight, only the bottom of the skirt could be seen--in the gap between her legs.

--Fantastic.

This can be settled without having to enter Hysteria mode....

Dear God. Perhaps I will be going to where you are very soon, and I will thank you again then.

After receiving Aria's windhole attack, I only lost consciousness for 3 minutes. I couldn't help but give thanks to my own endurance. Once I adjusted my police cap, I returned to my work post as a waiter.

But thinking about it in detail, my endurance was largely due to the training from Aria's brutal violence.

I take back my thanks.

"Hi, all students. Come this way!"

Shirayuki, dressed as a female teacher was speaking gently to a group of elementary school students and guiding them.

The children were making a din near the entrance of the Cosplay Cafeteria, becoming a nuisance to the other customers.

Responsible for being the cashier, Aria wanted to be their guide, but was taken as a playmate instead. In the end her pony tails were caught and she fell to the ground. As the shop manager, Shirayuki hurried over to resolve the situation.

(.....She's really well-trained in the methods to handle little children...)

The elementary school students who were standing all over the place just a while ago, quickly became obedient, lining up to take their seats.

It's no wonder she's the eldest of six sisters, one look and you can tell she'll definitely become a dutiful wife and loving mother in the future.

After helping them with their orders, Shirayuki came into the

backyard from the mess hall.

"There's a lot of customers, so let's raise our spirits! AI AI YO!"

Shirayuki said to the tired group of cosplayers--

Everyone seemed to be spurred on, raising their fists and shouting "YO--!"

Even though she was still expressionless, but Doctor Reki (Ph.D.) did the same thing as well. This is the first time I've seen her like this.

Following that, Shirayuki started giving instructions of the measures to take to handle the different situation for each and every table, making everyone's work a lot easier.

This is the true messiah.

"I see you have very good leadership capabilities...."

I said in a sigh to Shirayuki, who was writing down the priority list for the work to be done.

Might as well let her replace me as the leader for Baskerville, I've lost all confidence.

"No....."

Hearing my words, Shirayuki-sensei hurriedly adjusted her eye-glasses.

"My student council work has been lagging behind, I'll have to rush for that."

Following that, with a wonderful smile on her face, she walked towards me and helped me adjust my rank badge and tie.

"For the Butei, many are not good at work involving receiving customers. The Masters will deduct points because of this... Thanks to you, the situation has more or less been redeemed somewhat."

"....I... I was praised by Kin-chan..."

With an entranced expression showing on her face, Shirayuki's cheeks turned red instantly...

"I will work hard so I can be your helper. And also for those children who are unable to help at all. Ok, you can go now. Be safe." Shirayuki adjusted my police cap, and when she mentioned "children", she looked at Aria.

'Chey'--Taking a break and drinking honeydew melon soda, Aria, with a straw in her mouth, clicked her tongue in reply to Shirayuki's gaze.

Not only that, Aira was biting her straw and shooting glances at me at the same time.

Wh.. why are you emanating killing intent from your body.

Behaving differently from usual, she was looking at me with a bit of anxiety.

If you got something to say, say it. It's completely not like Aria's style.

"Look look, it's time for Aria to go for school. Did you forget anything?"

Shirayuki was somewhat delightedly speaking in a motherly tone. "No, I'm going off" Aria threw out a reply and walked out.

Then she ran back into the hall and viciously stepped on my foot.

What.. what the hell was that. Why did you get angry just because I praised Shirayuki.

And the act of physical punishment was so despicable. I felt her anger this time was different compared to previously.

Don't tell me there's new software installed in her brain? Uninstall it immediately!

After that, Aria kept having a weird look on her, like she wanted to speak but stopped herself, giving me a stare every now and then....

With some difficulty, I managed to endure till 5pm. Finally, I can change shifts.

Taking out the new phone I bought a few days ago, there was a message from Watson--No training for today? Recalling my antics when I entered Hysteria mode in front of her, I chose the splendor of ignoring the message.

Even without that factor, I'm dead beat from doing a bunch of stuff that I've never done before--not only did I have to address myself as "this police officer", I even had to bow after the customers made their orders.

I should just quickly go home and just eat something, take a shower, and sleep like a dead log.

As I was lifting my leg to return to the preparation room--

"Tohyama."

From the fourth preparation room, which was so small and cramp it could hardly be counted as a room, came a call for me, and it was done with the door closed.

"Jeanne?"

"It's me, come in here for a second."

"You're wearing clothes right?"

I asked Jeanne, who seemed unwilling to open the door for some reason.

"Are you stupid, of course I'm wearing clothes, but.... about this set of clothes, I want to discuss it with you."

Her reply caused me to have some doubts, so I entered the changing room.

In the changing room, Jeanne was wearing the "family cafe" type of frilly female waitress uniform.....

She was sitting on a metal-pipe chair, her body sprawled on top of the table.

On top of her head was a hair-band that was reminiscent of what a maid would wear, and I could see her ears under her shimmering silver hair.....

For some reason, her ears were red.

"What's the matter, you should be on the evening shift."

"Yes."

Still sprawled on the table, Jeanne's voice transmitted from her arm on the table.

"Then it's about time for you to get going."

"I know that!"

"Then get going quickly. You really like this set of clothes right."

This is because the clothes were Jeanne's own, and she made an effort to bring it out.

--I know, I accidentally saw it before.

"Ye.. Yes. But I still....once I think about appearing in front of everyone, I'll feel embarrassed."

"It can't be helped. This is the way things are, even I felt embarrassed too."

"Don't put me in the same league as you!"

Jeanne swiftly lifted her head, her whole face blushing red like Aria.

As Jeanne is 100% white Caucasian, so putting it more accurately, her face was pink.

Judging from her expression, it seems that while facing me, she's harboring some negative emotions with no outlet to let it out, so in order not to become some sort of snack--

"I get it, I get it. Then why did you call me into the changing room."

I said to Jeanne to pacify her.

"Tell me your opinions! You have seen me like this before. What do you think of it."

"I already told you back then. It's really cute! You don't have to worry."

"Really?"

"It's the truth. A police officer doesn't lie."

"Then say it again."

"Say what."

"Say that I'm cute! I've no confidence in myself. When I... I wear the clothes alone, I feel that it isn't too bad. And this is the set of clothes that I like the most. I've always wanted to try being a waitress for once. But, this.... girls of my height wearing clothes like this will be made out as some kind of joke. Everyone will certainly make sarcastic remarks."

I finally understood...

Jeanne is the type who does what she likes in private, but becomes very reserved in public.

When alone by herself, she is becomes broad-minded enough to start a fashion show, but once she faced me, who has seen her in those clothes, she'll feel very embarrassed.

"That's not going to happen. Have some confidence! You're very cute, come, let's go."

"You don't sound convincing at all!"

Jeanne stood up, waving her featherlight sleeves.

What a troublesome girl as well.

Just as I was starting to feel a bit tired, Jeanne leaned over with a 'pleading for help' look on her face .

Her featherlight skirt brushing against me.

"Actually... it seems that the kohais[12] from the tennis club will be

coming to see me. What should I do."

Ah.....

So that's how it is.

--Butei High is a school with some.. no, with a lot of feudalism.

The seniors must be strict with the juniors, and must more or less put on some airs in front of them.

This way, the relationship between the seniors and the juniors will be evident. This is necessary in order to ensure success during investigations and battles. Such similar culture exists in the Police and the Self Defense Force as well.

Hence, Jeanne was even more afraid of being laughed at by her juniors.

"No one will make a joke out of you. If there are really any first years who dare to make fun of you, I'll help you teach them a lesson. Look, there's only 15 minutes left!"

I looked at my watch--

Jeanne also looked at her shiny watch, which was adorned with precious stones, worn on the underside of her wrist.

"Un, un un, it's already this time now."

"Don't panic. This isn't like Jeanne at all. There won't be any problems. This police officer guarantees it. Let's go!"

I patted her on the shoulder to motivate her, but--

Crinkle, crinkle. Upon patting her, numerous tiny ice crystals flew out from her body.

What's that. Looks like diamond dust.

It's like some sort of mechanism which appears when she's agitated. This is a new discovery.

"--Tohyama. I wore these clothes only because of the lot that I drew, so you'll be responsible. If I become a joke, then prepare to be turned into a human hoarfrost!"

Although Jeanne said that, she still didn't want to leave the room on her own.

"What are you saying. And what, on earth is a human hoarfrost"

"It's hoarfrost made up of a human. Can't you understand simple words? Are you stupid?"

".... I've always been stupid. I was stupid to come here and listen to you. Get going. Come on, follow me."

Saying this, I finally managed to drag Jeanne forcefully out from the changing room--

"Jeanne-sempai!" "Jeanne-sempai!" "Sorry to have kept you waiting!"

We just barely walked out of the changing room, and 4, 5 first-year girls jumped out in front of the door.

They seemed to have gathered here after hearing Jeanne's voice, it looks like they're Jeanne's juniors in the tennis club.

"Ah!"

It seems that Jeanne haven't mentally prepared herself yet, freezing on the spot and turning into a human hoarfrost herself

I shifted my gaze to the first years, and was about to say "First years, if you dare to make fun of her, I'll arrest the whole lot of you!"--

"IYAAA---!!! SO CUTE!!!!"

But the first year girls were screaming away with their eyes fixated on Jeanne.

IYAAA!!! IYAAA!!!

SO CUTE!!! SO CUTE!!!

The girls were so caught up in a rapturous frenzy they totally ignored my existence, surrounding Jeanne who was dressed as a waitress.

"Cu... cu.. cute....?"

Jeanne's rose red lips were trembling slightly as she said.

The girls were still obsessively screaming cute.

"Ah, this... this--was because of drawing lots, I had no choice but to wear these clothes--I know I'm not really suitable for it, and...!"

Jeanne clumsily blurted. But her juniors were still heaping praises and saying "No way! Sempai is so cute!!" "Jeanne-sempai looks good in anything she wears!! So cute!!" "Sempai is a goddess!! So cute!!"

"Un... Un un.....!"

Jeanne....

Her gaze started drifting as she became shy.

Her reaction caused the first year girls to yell cute again.

But... besides "cute", don't you all have other words of description you can use?

Looking at first year students talking excitedly and crowding towards the side of the window--

(Come to think of it, Jeanne is really well respected--)

I felt somewhat touched inside.

Shirayuki is the same as well, she seems to possess some sort of attributes that causes the kohais to respect her. This is quite important for Butei who will eventually have subordinates. During the end of term after our second year, there will be a grading for "Leadership capabilities. Suitability as a government official"...

Jeanne will definitely score full marks for this.

Although she looks extremely cold-blooded, she will never bully her kohais, or give out impossible tasks to them. Plus she's also a beautiful girl liked by both guys and girls, although she's a bit slow-witted by nature, but she's a jack-of-all-trades... Even among students of the same year, she's a very reliable person.

Before this I heard of rumors like this--Jeanne's popularity among the first years started in the tennis club, and was slowly spreading towards Informa, Connect, Repier, Inquesta and other places.

Presently, Watson has the slight advantage for now, but if the trends continue on like this, Jeanne would definitely get the upper hand.

(Jeanne seems to have some sort of strength to attract people towards her.... perhaps a genetic inheritance from her ancestor....)

Just to add on, Aria is very well-respected by the first years in Assault as well, but this was due to her personal ability, and not her personality. She's pretty strict on kohais.

And Riko. There's no need to mention her. She's the type who'll end up playing with the kohais.

There's no need to elaborate on Reki as well.

From now on, I'll use Jeanna and Shirayuki as a positive example, while the others will be deemed as bad examples.

As for me, I have not much of popularity, Within the kohais, only Fuma knows about me.

(Anyway.... looks like I won't be turned into a human hoarfrost.)

Just as I started to relax myself--

Trouble appeared.

Jeanne was on cloud nine after being flattered by her kohais, all sorts of emotions surging within her.

"...."

Wearing her graceful skirt, she leapt out from the window.

"Hey! Hey...."

Although this was the first floor and no injuries will be sustained, but if a deserter (people who are absent without valid reason) appears, there will be a negative impact on the Cosplay Cafeteria.

If so... the Masters will judge us as incompetent, and everyone will be deemed responsible and slammed viciously by Ranbyou. I reckon the impact can result in internal organs being puked out from the mouth. Of course, this involves me as well.

I rushed to the side of the window, only to see Jeanne's hands covering her fiery red cheeks, running swiftly towards the center courtyard.

As she wasn't paying attention to the road in front of her, in no time at all, she bumped into a scarecrow on the field growing herbs.

"Sempai! Where are you going?" "Please let me take a photo!" "Are you heading for the Cosplay Cafeteria?"

I ditched the first years behind, who crowded at the window side within moments.

Using the emergency exit, I ran out towards the center courtyard, in pursuit of Jeanne.

As I realized that this problem involves my internal organs, my tracking skills increased tremendously as well.

Very quickly, I found Jeanne's hiding place.

She had left one of her lacy leather shoes behind near a small storage room in the center courtyard. Don't tell me you're Cinderella.

Like a real police officer relentlessly pursuing a criminal, I pressed my face lightly against the wooden wall.

Jeanne was sitting on a wooden chair, and I could see one side of her face from here.

"Ho ho, ho ho ho....."

Both hands pressed onto her burning cheeks, I have never seen such a cute expression on her face.

Acting just like how other girls of her age should act, the smile overflowing from her face even infected a bystander like me with bliss.

"..... It's really such a joy!"

Jeanne usually makes people feel like she's a Hollywood actress, always with an uptight look on her face. So her expression now could be considered to be truly refreshing.

It even feels like it's the first time I'm getting to know her true self.

".... Cute, I'm cute! As a waitress, I'm very cute...."

Jeanne lowered her head, immersing in every single moment the bliss which belongs only to her. A beautiful lace ribbon was tied on her silver hair.

And so she simply sat there, straightening both her legs, swinging it back and forth lightly.

(.....)

For some reason, I suddenly felt that I shouldn't continue peeping on her like this.

Her breasts, which were contoured on her clothes, were starting to shake continuously along with her swinging legs, making me feel that the scene was becoming very dangerous.

"Well from the looks of it, she probably won't run away from here...."

I smiled wryly and turned around with my back facing the wooden

shed.

Watson is like this as well....

Maybe it's because of the reason that as a descendant of the heroine Jeanne D'Arc and that she was adopted, Jeanne always felt she wasn't "girly" enough somewhere.

But girls will be girls.

She was probably always fretting over how to show her feminine side.

The Cosplay Cafeteria was just the thing to help Jeanne fulfill this wish, and show her that what she thought about herself was always wrong.

Perhaps she will eventually start showing the side of herself which she has been hiding, little by little.

Through meaningless activities, the school is a place that lets its students grow continuously, Or at least it's a place that gives you the chance to grow.

"Of course, if it's a normal school.... there should be much more chances like this."

I looked at my watch, in another 7 to 8 minutes, Jeanne will have to take over the shift.

Jeanne.

I'll just let her enjoy her happiness here for a while longer. Then the waitress job which she has been looking forward to for some time will have to start.

You must work hard!

When you first came to Butei High, you didn't even know what flavored drinks were.

Finally changing into my Butei High uniform, I started walking back in the glow of the sunset.

The buses have stopped operating during the cultural festival. So I had to walk back to the dorm.

"Tohyama....."

From an abandoned building used for battle training, came a voice calling out for me.

As this was like a real war zone, all I could see was a chaotic mess. So it was covered up by plastic canvas sheets, and was out of bounds, but....

That voice, I seem to have heard it somewhere before.

It's that fox girl, in reality a fox spirit, and a comrade in "Deen". I think her name was Tamamo.

"Tamamo, you're back. But why today of all days."

As I replied, I lifted a blue plastic canvas sheet and walked into the abandoned building.

The exposed concrete on the first floor were full of bullet markings.

Dust particles in the building danced in the air as a gust of wind blew in from a broken window.

Sunlight streaming in from all corners shone onto the dust particles like a spotlight.

"Today is naught the day of Tomobiki (友引), tis a fine day for making many friends."

Stepping on the ground strewn with broken glass and bullet shells, I walked further in, towards where Tamamo's voice came from.

"Let me tell you, the television crews are here today. If you get caught by them and get broadcasted on air as 'Rare Animal Caught', I won't do anything to help."

Chatting with her, I lifted my head and found her standing on top of a steel beam laid on its side and hanging high up in the air.

She was wearing a mini version of Butei High's sailor uniform.

"I hath no wish to hath these ears of mine pulled and examined with intrigue and amusement. Hence, I came wearing the uniform of students here."

Tamamo said, while standing within a beam of light.

She was wearing a small uniform cap with a wave-shaped hem, and there were actually something shaped like two fox ears poking upwards at the top of the cap.

Hey, is this really alright.

"Yes, Tohyama. I hath heard you brought defeat to Hilda. Well done!"

Swish! Tamamo leapt off the steel beam with animal-like movements.

With her movements, I saw her tail which was hidden under her skirt.

So there is still no way to make the tail vanish. But if I told her this, she'll definitely get angry. So I chose to remain silent.

"You know pretty much. Who told you?"

"Tis the head of Liberty Mason who told me. Whilst discussing the problem of what comes under the jurisdiction of "Deen", it was proposed not to proceed with the extermination of the prisoner in the Demon Barrier--Hilda."

Liberty Mason……

I see. After I defeated Hilda, Watson must have contacted them immediately and reported the facts.

With a bright look on my face for unraveling the truth, Tamamo

gradually approached me, and suddenly extended both hands in front of me.

"What are you doing? I don't have any malt candy."

"No. Tis for thou to carry me."

"Carry you? You're not a little kid...."

"As there is no deity palanquin, I canst only lower my expectations and hath thou carry me. Tis an honour for thou. Be quick about it, and carry me around for sight-seeing. Or dost it matter naught that thou suffers retribution."

Tamamo stood tip-toed, and patted at my nose.

Well, no matter what, this guy is still considered a god... of sorts.

If I really get struck by retribution, and my luck worsens, then my life will really be in a sorry state.

But when I reached both my hands under her armpits, and tried to carry her up...

"I say, you're quite heavy to carry. Should be at least 20 kilos and above. How heavy are you exactly?"

"Thou dares to asks my weight, does thou not know tis a forbidden number to ask of goddesses or even all women."

Using both hands, Tamamo hugged my neck tightly with no intention of letting go.

"Then you should at least change your form from a second year elementary schooler to a baby."

Hearing what I said, Tamamo used both her legs to start climbing onto my body.

"Aiya, thou should stop complaining. Think of something quickly. Good fortune will come from carrying a deity. Haha!"

Using both hands to support Tamamo's bottom, who was rubbing herself excitedly against my body, I lifted her up....

No matter what, I finally managed to carry this deity.

"I'll die from exhaustion if I carry you all over the place like this."

I said to Tamamo's face which was directly in front of my eyes.

Tamamo looked very happy, her face filled with innocence.

Looking close-up at her big round eyes, it seemed to have aroused my so-called fatherly instincts.

If there weren't any fox ears or tail, her appearance will easily make her a target for abduction.

"Why, thou seems verily interested in me. Art thou smitten with me."

Tamamo laughingly said to me, who was staring fixedly at her.

"Don't talk nonsense. The age difference is too big."

"791 years counts for naught much. Tis naught a thing impossible in a world of transformation."

"That's not what I mean. You're saying it in reverse, reverse."

"Reverse? Guh, the Tohyama Samurai of before frequently says things I do not understand as well."

Saying things which people don't understand, that should be you right.

I think my ancestors-sama must have gotten more than just a few headaches because of her. For some reason, the fates of our family and Tamamo appears to be closely intertwined.

I sighed inwardly, and started to tease Tamamo.

"Hiraga from Amdo was around this area for quite some time just now, we're screwed now."

"It'll definitely be snatched away if it's discovered. Once that girl sees something sweet, even the color of her eyes changes."

"Here, here. Let's hide here and eat... ah, Kinji...."

The voices of girls came from the entrance of the abandoned building.

The 3 girls were holding in their hands gigantic crêpes which were probably some sort of freebie.

They opened their big mouths in shock at seeing me carrying Tamamo.

"Ab... ab.. abduction...."

"To actually bring such a small girl to this place...."

"It must be an abduction. We have to report this immediately to the Masters and Children Welfare Services."

Oi.....

My luck didn't turn for the better at all. I'm obviously already carrying a deity.

On closer inspection, I noticed that the 3 people were my classmates in school. Yelling "This is so dangerous!", they took out cellphones from the pockets of their skirt.

"No, it's not like that."

I hurriedly put Tamamo down, trying to explain the situation clearly.

This will definitely be a bad thing once it involves Informa and the Butei triple punishment.

"Thi.... this is a child who lost her way."

I declared, well aware of the fact that I'll have to start a gun fight if all else fails.

"A child who lost her way?"

With a confused look on her face, Tamamo lifted her head to look at me.

"Yes. A child who lost her way."

Tamamo seemed to sense the effort I was putting in for this.

"No, I mean ye... ye... yes."

She seemed to have understood the present situation, following up on my words.

Just that her acting skills were really terrible.

In doubt, the girls said,

"A child who lost her way?

"Doesn't look like it."

"It just feels like she's been tamed."

The girls seemed to have completely believed the opinion that I have abducted a little girl.

"Adding on, isn't she wearing a Butei High intern uniform? There's no possibility she's a kid who lost her way."

That girl is well and truly a student from Inquesta.

Damn it, don't use your deductive reasoning skills in a place like this.

"That, well.... she really lost her way, than she was sent to me. She's my cousin."

"Uhn, yes. I wanted to see onii-chan."

Said Tamamo as she hugged my waist tightly.

"How can Kinji's cousin look so cute!"

"This has nothing to do with the face. Hey, let's go. It's really great to be able to see onii-chan."

I clumsily played along with Tamamo's act.

"Uhn, let's go. Onii-chan won't let you become lost again."

I held Tamamo's little hand which was waving in the air, finally managing to escape from the abandoned building.

I didn't know whether those girls believed what we said, the sounds of their discussion coming from the back.

"So that's how it is. Oh yeah, the cat-ears cap that little girl was wearing was really cute."

"It seemed to be moving."

"Maybe it's fitted with actuators."

Apparently Tamamo's cat-ears cap has turned into their next discussion topic.

Just that it isn't cat ears, but fox ears. And they're real.

Wiping the cold sweat on my forehead, I spoke to Tamamo.

"Tamamo, I can bring you anywhere you want to go, but can you change your form?"

I feebly supported my hands on my knees, pleading with Tamamo.

A second year high school student walking around with a little girl. even if it wasn't those people just now, other people might report me as well.

"Uhn, thou's physical strength will not be capable of carrying me around and move freely."

"Then we have a deal."

"So it shalt be done."

Once Tamamo was done talking, white smoke suddenly appeared at her feet.

"....."

I looked over....

And found that Tamamo's figure had vanished, and there was now a Temari beside my feet.

Oh yeah, she can change into these things.

"Hey. Carry me and go."

With the ball speaking, I bent over to pick her up. It's very light, about the same weight as a normal ball.

"You should have changed into this form from the start. Come to think of it, how does Tamamo do it."

"Tis the jitsu for emptiness transformation. Thou would understand naught even if I explained it."

Opening up the conversation with a condescending tone, the ball continued speaking.

"First, 'Mustard Particle'. Tis a singular point that possesses an extremely strong gravitational pull. These points are very tiny, but everywhere around us. Each and every one of these points are connected to one another. Using the 'Heavenly Streams of Fox Lightning', attractive and repulsive forces are applied to these bonds, manipulating the bonds into a shape of a tube. With 'Matter Fog', these are passed through my small body. The ends of the tube have a space of 'Emptiness', which exists on this space as well. The ball is placed in this space, and is used to replace my illusionary little girl form. Once the 'seal' is recited in my mind, these steps can be achieved in mere moments. Tis a matter which occurs in a blink of an eye."

"I'm sorry, I completely don't understand what that means."

"Using thou's terms, tis manipulating a wormhole."

".... I don't know what this is as well."

Come to think of it, you don't even know what panties are, but you actually know about a wormhole.

"Tohyama, thou art lacking in learning. Tis to say, although I'm here, but I'm not here as well. From the perspective of reality, if the ball is destroyed, I'll lose 'Mustard Particles', and have no way of returning from 'Emptiness'. Because the ball is me now, hence thou must be careful, and then even more so.

So this is the so-called magical transformation. Whatever.

(But this is really something. Be it Hilda or this guy...)

These non-human races have existed since eons ago, but their techniques are far more advanced than the forefront advancements of our science.

Although I don't know the specifics about wormholes, but mankind only knows that it 'possibly exists'. Even Hilda's Electric Charged Particles are only being researched by scientists in research facilities. But they are already able to make use of it.

If these are the kind of freaks in "Grenada" I have to fight with from now on....

Then it'll be like fighting people whom are from 100 years in the future.

But...

I suddenly thought of a phrase taught during a lesson in school.

Combat.

In this field, mankind has combined their intelligence and outstanding capabilities.

Not to self-boast, but mankind has progressed till now from recurring wars.

This is why the advances in this field far outpace the rest.

Aria's Colt Government was produced in 1911, about 100 years ago from now. Humans have not made any improvements to it since then.

That is to say humans have produced combat tech 100 years ago.

Then how many years has it been since the first person used Hysteria mode.

Now in a position with no choices left, the only thing I can do is try.

As Tamamo ordered me to "Take me to where Shirayuki is", I called up Shirayuki to say hi.

After her work at the Cosplay Cafeteria ended, Shirayuki went to the Supernatural Searching Research (SSR in short).

Seems to be for self-study, no wonder she's an honors student.

"I really don't like it much here...."

Reaching the SSR building, I felt a lost of interest due to the appearance of the building.

Firstly, the entrance was a vermillion gateway, it was like a tunnel directly linking to the building.

Looking around the entrance, there was a statue of Chinese Guardian Lion on the right hand side, and a statue of Sphinx on the left hand side.

The surroundings were full of Totem poles, Buddha statues, Moai statues, lanterns and what-nots on display.

Although there were Japanese barrier-sealing ropes hanging above my head, but hanging in front of me wasn't large Japanese bells, but rather something like the yellow copper bells in a prayer room.....

In front of me was a written message.

--"Those with no business here are prohibited from entering the SSR"--

It was on a lookout board. I can't think of having any business in this kind of place.

This is a research department for super powers and magical abilities. A lair of secret arts. And a place I can't stand the most.

"Why does thou hath such a grim look. The surrounding atmosphere seems pretty nice."

The Tamamo-ball said.

"It looks like the gods are about to start an argument. You're considered a deity of sorts. Looking at the scene in front of you, don't you think it's some sacrilege."

"Times now are no longer of the old. But the truth each god seeks tis the same. And since telling humans to 'get along well', what manner will become of us if the gods starts fighting amongst ourselves."

"I see...."

Well, since she put it that way, then it no longer matters.

Pushing the large entrance door decorated with colorful stained glass, I entered the SSR.

The decorations in the hall still made me broke out in cold sweat.

In order to allow the students to pray here, the spacious hall were dotted with a few seat-cushions and chairs. The walls to the half-dome roof were full of ancient religious drawings.

This is truly a world I cannot comprehend.

What's going on in the minds of these SSR people. There was even a Wooden Fish[13] placed on top of a pipe organ.

A sign with "Anyone fighting will be shot to death -- From Masters"

stuck beside an Aztec Calendar is the only thing here I understand.

"……so to say the Roswell Incident…"

"…..through similar magic the mysterious links can be….."

"….It's really tasty, the fried and smoked red…"

I can hear the conversations of students situated in a corner of the hall.

There were all sorts of clothes they were wearing. One girl was dressed like a Tengu, but it was not a spear she carried on her back, but a bow and demon-slaying arrows instead.

A turban on the head, and speaking in Wheel Hatha yoga pose, that one must be a foreign exchange student from India. That guy holding a sutra in his hand and eating some dry-fried food, was actually wearing a cassock.

"Looketh, everyone gets along very well."

Tamamo-ball exposed the tip of her tail, pointed at the students and said.

Besides sighing, there wasn't anything replay I could come up with. I carried Tamamo up the stairs with heavy steps.

As the number of students in SSR are very few, the second floor and above have only units of single rooms.

On reaching the fifth floor, I knocked loudly on the door to a room with the name "Hotogi Shirayuki" written on an Ema shaped wooden sign.

"Coming, coming!"

Shirayuki's voice came from inside the room, following the patter of footsteps, came the sound of the door being unlocked.

When the door just opened, I could see a sliding door adorned with pentagrams, samurai helms, and the Hotogi family crest through the

opening slit.

When the door was fully opened....

"Welcome, Kin-chan."

Greeting me politely, Shirayuki came out to receive me, dressed in her Miko garb.

There was a 3-way mirror left slightly ajar in the room, could it be because she was putting on make-up just now?

(Actually there's no need to go through so much preparation just to greet me....)

Upon seeing the gloomy look on my face.

Shirayuki's eyes instantly teared up as she said,

"Ahh.... Kin-chan doesn't like these Miko clothes very much. I always wear these clothes in SSR, so.... I'll go change immediately, please wait for a while."

Once she finished talking, she was about to close the sliding door.

"It's fine, I have something to discuss with you."

I said, as I pressed against the sliding door with my hand, took out my shoes and walked into the room.

Inside was a Japanese-style room with 10 tatami mats laid on the floor, on top of a painted rack was a statue of Dharma Buddha.

In 6 bamboo tubes laid alongside one another, each had a windmill made by her younger sisters.

I appraised the room, which was the complete embodiment of a Japanese-style room.

"Hotogi Shirayuki, thou hast grown up as well."

The ball I was holding suddenly moved onto the floor.

White smoke emitted from the floor, and in less than a second Tamamo returned to her original form.

"Ah!"

Shirayuki yelped in shock as she looked at the grinning Tamamo.

"Ta...Ta... Tamamo-sama!"

Swoosh!

Shirayuki dived onto the tatami mat.

The Miko garb's skirt fluttered in the air, coming to a pause at the time she knelt down.

"It has been a long time since paying my respects, I didn't know you were coming. I'm deeply sorry that I have prepared nothing!"

Shirayuki was like an employee who saw a supervisor on a surprise visit.

Holding a windmill in her hand, Tamamo slowly walked towards her.

"Thine bad habit of apologizing constantly hath changed naught. Come, lift up your face."

Making Shirayuki raise her upper body, it seems Tamamo wanted to squirm in between Shirayuki's knees and chest.

Ah, Tamamo actually grabbed Shirayuki's breast. You lusting fox.

Then, Tamamo turned her back towards Shirayuki and sat onto her knees.

"Tamamo-sama has not changed as well...."

"Shirayuki, thou hast finally gotten used to a mixed school. How goes your zither practice, can you ride a bicycle now?"

"Really, please do not talk about the things of my childhood."

Looking at them happily conversing away.....

So the both of them really knew each other from the start.

Sitting cross-legged at the Japanese-style low table in the room, I drank the green tea prepared by Shirayuki.

"No matter what, tis a good thing that the Tohyama Samurai and Hotogi Miko are of the same age."

Tamamo pointed a finger at me and spoke.

"So how is it, Shirayuki. Hast thou been done giving birth to children for this guy?"

PFFFTT!

I spat out the tea in my mouth in one breath.

Being asked that question by Tamamo with the tone of "What did you have for dinner last night?", Shirayuki's body softened gradually like an octopus. Replying at Tamamo's ear side.

"I.. I.. I can do it at any time..."

But why are you looking at me and saying that.

Looking at the speechless me, Shirayuki suddenly buried her face into Tamamo's head.

".... What should we do hubby, our daughter says she wants a little brother or sister..."

Tamamo muttered softly, as her finger drew the "の" symbol on the tatami mat.

Listening up to here, even my face started turning red.

"Shi.. Shirayuki. Lift your face up. Don't bother about Tamamo's irrelevant remarks."

"Yes, yes. Father of the child. Let's do our best! How many, no, how many dozens of kids should we have?"

"Don't look at me with your eyes glowing like that. And who's this father of the child. Tamamo, stop saying useless things and quickly get to the point."

I said with some anxiety. Straightening her tail, Tamamo replied "Yes yes", and came to the side of the low table.

Shirayuki appeared at my side in an instant, and sat beside me. Even if I avoid her, she'll just continue to stick to me. So I just gave up, and the both of us sat facing Tamamo.

Following that, Tamamo....

She first spoke to Shirayuki about the "Far Eastern War" which has already begun.

And the incident with me getting involved in the war as the leader of Baskerville.

She also mentioned my battle with Hilda, and how I finally won.

Shirayuki listened calmly from the start till the end. As expected from an armed Miko.

Some of the technical terms that appeared and was used during this period of time, which I didn't really understand, she seemed to understand them as well.

".... Anti-demon barriers have been set up in all the harbours within the city. If any demon barge in, the Shikigami will inform me, and I will proceed to attack it using seals."

"Since this is the case, then we can consider the matters that will come next."

Under the premise of joining in the war, she spoke about numerous related topics.

"Hey, Shirayuki. Getting involved into this war, are you not afraid?"

"No. I have heard about the "Battle" in the Hotogi. And through my divination, I have known long ago that these things will continue to occur within the next few years."

You're really optimistic. After my fight with Hilda, I discovered that this will be a tough battle."

I said, as if trying to confirm Shirayuki's determination.

Shirayuki gave a light smile.

It was a very peaceful, long-standing Shirayuki-type of smile.

"The Hotogi Miko are protective Mikos. We have always fought for the sake of protecting. The chaos in the country, wars, and the few "Battles" encountered, protecting is what we always, and always will do. And..."

Shirayuki's expression hardened.

In an instant, as if re-affirming what she has already set her decision on, spoke hesitantly.

"I will burn out all the ashes that lands on Kin-chan, no matter who that person is."

She lightly touched Irokane Ayame's ruby-colored sheath at her waist as she spoke.

The term 'burn out all the ashes' is a contradiction by itself.

No matter, since she means to join us just like always.

"Oh right, Tamamo. Although it's a bit late to ask this question now... what's the aim of starting this so-called war in the first place? Even though Jeanna said it's for 'needs, fighting for something-something..."

"Tis like what Jeanne hath said. Fighting for something thou needs. Carrying out the redistribution of power. Tis is the intent of the war."

"Then what are all of you fighting over?"

"Tis the same as all other wars, things being fought over changes with time. Last time, twas fighting over precious swords, holy grails and so on. And now, tis for Irokane. Tis the best treasure of all. Although twas never cared much for til now, but the world's greatest genius Sherlock found the method to harness its power."

Sherlock....

Come to think of it, that guy did describe Irokane as "The Core of the Supernatural World".

So this is the thing that Deen and Grenada are going all-out to obtain.

"Things being fought over changes with time....."

I seem to understand somewhat now.

Using the outside world as an example, in the past, no one paid any attention to the Wulan Mountain Mine.

But once the method of exploiting it became known to the world, everyone started scrambling for it blindly.

Hence, causing a war to break out.

"Tis not only treasures. Excellent soldiers are targets to fight over as well. Tis why, since ancient times, defeated soldiers are incorporated into one's own flag. Defeated soldiers will also initiate switching sides to the enemy so as not to get killed."

"Oh....."

This is similar to Jeanne's "Betrayal is OK", and Watson's "The defeated party is the surbodinate of the enemy".

Thinking like this, I seem to have an understanding on the system for the "Battle".

"Then.... what will it take to end the war?"

"Total annihilation or surrender. Tis either Deen or Grenada's soldiers gets wiped out, or all the soldiers of one side choose to surrender. Conditional surrender is recognised as well."

This seems to be the same as wars of the outside world.

I glaced sideways at Shirayuki, and noticed that she had a face which indicated she already knew everything.

"Shirayuki, some problems hath surfaced but recently."

Tamamo straightened her seiza position, speaking to Shirayuki.

"Aria's 'Seven Stars of the Scarlet Shell' has been damaged, and the fragments hath been taken by Grenada."

"....."

This was the first time that Shirayuki became shocked at something Tamamo said.

"I met Watson just now, as proof of alliance. I demanded this. Counting this piece, Deen now hast 3 pieces of the golden shell."

Tamamo took out a gem which looked like a ruby. That's the

crystallized form of a piece of the golden shell which shields the Hidan.

Maintaining her seiza, Shirayuki moved backwards, then bowed deeply.

"Our deepest apologies, if only the Hotogi Miko could have made the Golden Shell sturdier in the past, this would have never..."

"Tis not the fault of the Hotogi, you are so few, to hath done this is already remarkable."

"However, the Irokane Ayame which was bonded to me was taken away by Patra a while ago. As such, the Hidan...."

Just as Shirayuki spoke till this point--

Tamamo's gaze suddenly became sharp like never before.

"Shirayuki, stop speaking. Coincidentally Tohyama is here as well. Hotogi and Tohyama can share the workload and help one another."

".....What are you talking about. What's happened with the Irokane Ayame?"

"Don't ask. The hihi-irokane bonds to the human heart. And love is an extremely difficult portion to master. The more you know, the more your heart becomes confused. Humans are unable to master their internal feelings."

"?"

"From the past, the Hotogi Miko whom are deeply connected to the Irokane, are able to be aqcuainted with the Tohyama Samurai till now, tis because the Tohyama family is a clan that fights with the heart. Thou should consider carefully what this means. Does thou naught hath matters which thou does not wish to tell Hotogi?"

The hihi-irokane obviously loves "Love" and "War", just now Tamamo....

Only spoke about the part on love.

"Things which I do not want to tell Hotogi..."

She seems to know about the hereditary power passed on from generation to generation in the Tohyama family.

(Hysteria mode is definitely linked to our emotional state with members of the opposite sex, but so what?)

... I feel the atmosphere becoming a bit weird now.

The supernatural and topics on romance are the 2 boundaries where I'm the worst at.

If Tamamo mentions about Hysteria mode at this time, things will become problematic for me, best to remain silent for now.

"In order to successfully resolve this issue, the cooperation between Tohyama and Shirayuki is of utmost importance. So the both of you must get along well."

Drinking her tea, a contented-looking Tamamo looked at Shirayuki who answered with a loud "Yes".

"Not to worry, no matter what happens, I'll always be at your sides."

With a somewhat frozen smile, Tamamo looked in my direction.

"Be at your sides..."

When we were fighting Hilda, why weren't you around.

Although setting up the barriers is definitely a busy task....

"As for Aria, I will speak with her soon. The golden shell must be retrieved. To err on the side of caution, I'll also perform a preliminary diagnosis on the progress of the deitification into the Scarlet Blazing God."

"... Is Aria fine?"

I asked somewhat worriedly.

"Tis should be fine for the time being. Thou should worry naught.

As long as Grenada is defeated, and all the golden shells are retrieved, there will not be any problems."

Since the expert has said her piece, then I have no objections as well.

But regardless...

I don't really know about Aria's condition yet, so it's not so good I worry about it now.

Aria still seems to be pretty spirited, so my worries may really be groundless fears.

"....."

I suddenly noticed that while I was speaking to Tamamo about Aria,

Shirayuki seemed to be intentionally withholding her comments and listening at the sides.

Tamamo, for some reason, did not even glance at Shirayuki.

It feels as if the both of them have a premonition about something, but didn't wish to say anything.

I furrowed my brows.

I don't know why, but my mind suddenly recalled what Tamamo once told me.

--About 700 years ago, someone transformed into the Scarlet Blazing God.

That person turned into a monster, and started wars....

Before it was finally killed by the Tohyama Samurai and Hotogi Miko.....

5th Ammo: Cultural Festival Day 2 -Carnaval Finale-

Leaving Tamamo and Shirayuki behind at SSR, I went back to my room--there was the scent of gardenia in the room.

Aria is in the room then.

Walking past the corridor... The curtains of the changing area to the bathroom was drawn, and the sound of a hairdryer could be heard within.

Looks like she went straight into the bathroom after coming back.

"I'm back."

As Aria staying here has become a fact, so to say....

"Ah, Kinji? Wai.. Wait, if you dare open the curtain I'll shoot you dead. I'm covered with a towel now."

... Looks like there's no need to say anything.

Who the hell wants to open it. A pandora box containing a naked girl and weapons.

But... in the past, when I came back to such situations, Aria would always start firing intimidation shots without waiting for any explanation, yet now, it's simply verbal threats only.

(Really.... Aria's attitude towards me has softened somewhat recently.)

I guess this can be considered a good thing.

"Kinji."

"What is it?"

"Today's a tiring day, so we'll just rest... what are you doing tomorrow. There's no more work for you right."

"I'm not doing anything, so I'll just swing by the cultural festival and walk around."

"Me too, I don't have any work tomorrow, before noon."

"Then you can go walk around the cultural festival as well."

"....."

.....Eh?

Why is Aria keeping quiet?

"....Why are you so quiet?"

"Ah, didn't I already mention.... I'll be free tomorrow as well until noon. I'll only have something on in the afternoon."

She repeated what she just said.

"....What should I do before noon?"

Aria intentionally asked the question out loudly, switching off the hairdryer.

Following that, there were rustling noises, probably changing clothes.

"What should I DO?"

Shit... she seems to sound a bit angry.

If I don't give some suggestions, it's likely I'm gonna get shot by her.

Even with the curtain drawn, Aria is still capable to accurately hitting her target.

"--You can walk around the places you feel like going. I heard Muto's younger sister opened a Takoyaki stall, and it's selling like hotcakes."

I cautiously offered my own opinion...

".... I say, is your ability to talk only at the elementary school level?"

Drawing the curtain open and walking out, Aria was wearing her sailor uniform and staring at me as she spoke.

"Wha.. what are you trying to say."

Aren't you at an elementary school level yourself, in terms of body height.

"Then I'll say it, aren't you going to the cultural festival tomorrow to walk around? By chance, coincidentally, accidentally, I'll be free all the way until noon... so, I can accompany you too! You're really hopeless!"

According to my interpretation of the speech patterns in Aria Language, which I have finally figured out recently--

The meaning of her words were "I order you to go with me."

Simply put, she wants company. Alright, I'll go along, since I'll be free anyway.

"Then... do me a favor, please go with me."

The way of replying is very important as well.

To Aria ojou-sama.... using the "I'm taking the initiative to ask you" type of speaking is key to survival.

I glanced at the edges of her skirt, and as expected, the guns were there, just like usual.

"Alright alright, then I'll accompany you and we can go together. I really don't know what to do with you."

Aria's voice feels significantly cheerful.

Her expression has softened as well, and the killing intent has dissipated...

Well done, my Aria Remote Control. It was done so beautifully, I couldn't help but admire myself.

"If I leave Kinji alone, you'll definitely cause trouble, and it'll be terrible if you got lost. I'll just have to be your guardian for the time being, so you should thank me quickly! Visiting the cultural festival at 9 in the morning tomorrow, ok, it's entered into my schedule."

.... I'll become lost?

(I'll see ghosts first before I get lost in my own school, and, whichever way you look at it, the guardian should be me.)

Although there's a lot of things to rebut...

But, Aria seemed pretty happy as she entered the schedule into her new pearl-white handphone.

The only thing was, her "A good chance has arrived" type of excitement made me feel somewhat uneasy.....

After all, Aria has always been using her petite body frame to endure the cruelties of fate.

Since it's rare to have a short period of time for free activity, I'll just accompany her.

This day, the other members of Baskerville didn't come to the room, so Aria and I watched television and chatted away.

.... Then, we enjoyed a very rare leisurely dinner.

After dinner, around 10pm in the evening--

The phone in the room rang.

I picked up the handset, and found that Tamamo had called.

"Tell Aria to take the call", she said over the phone.....

Hence, I called Aria over to the phone, and looking at her seriously, said,

"Aria, I have something to say first... I have something to do with this call."

"....."

"Actually I should have told you sooner, but, regarding this matter, I'm no different from any other amateur.... I may not be able to explain this to you accurately, so, I'll let the expert do it."

"Expert?"

"It's someone with links to Shirayuki and Jeanne. It's an important matter for you, so listen to this calmly."

Done speaking, I passed the handset to her--

After saying "This is Kanzaki Aria", the conversation started.

I stood by the side and watched in silence... Although Aria looked visibly shocked several times, but she appeared calm from the beginning till the end.... The phone call ended in a very short time.

Click

Aria placed the handset back....

Closing her camellia eyes, she was deep in her thoughts for a while.

"Aria..."

"--Never mind, Kinji. Your assessment was correct. This matter--is definitely not in your area of expertise."

Aria shook her head lightly.

She headed towards the door.

"But I've always had this feeling. Koko, Hilda, Watson, all turning up one after another, there must be some inside story to all these."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to speak with Tamamo in private. We'll be meeting at the

sports center where the cultural festival is held at night. Kinji... We'll talk tomorrow. About the things from now on."

"Alright."

Tamamo probably meant everything. About the Far Eastern War, Golden Shell, and the Scarlet Blazing God--

Be careful Aria.

The next morning, at 8.30am--

I arrived at the outdoor swimming pool where I met Aria yesterday.

The Masters had instructed "To prevent mingling, meeting places that comes immediate to mind are not allowed to be used.", so I decided to use this place as the meeting location...

Aria hasn't arrived yet.

The meeting time was supposed to be at 9am.

But, when we went to the festival at Ueno during the summer holidays, Aria strictly ordered me to arrive 30 minutes early, saying that she'll let me have a taste of windhole giant volcano or windhole active volcano as punishment if I made her wait.

So, bored out of my skull, I could only wait at the diving platform of the second lane.....

Under the blue autumn sky, staring blankly at the swimming pool, waiting for Aria.

Last night, Aria didn't come back....

She called back in the night, saying that after speaking with Tamamo, she's meeting Shirayuki to get specific details-- furthermore, she also has some matter which she needed help from her female kōhai, so she'll be sleeping over at the girls dorm.

--She sounded the same as usual.

Even though she heard so many things, but she didn't appear to be in a state of confusion.

No, maybe it's like what she said--on some level, she felt it through her intuition.

"Kinji."

Aria appeared--much earlier than I expected.

Aria was pacing along under the autumn sunlight... She sat beside me, on the diving platform of the first lane.

.....? The sailor uniform she usually wears looks new.

"Did you iron it? Your clothes."

"Ah, yeah."

"You actually know how to iron your clothes. Didn't you almost cause a fire last time you used the iron in my room?"

".... Because I don't know how, so I asked Mamiya to help me iron the clothes."

Ah, so she asked her Battle-kōhai[14] Mamiya for help.

--Butei High has this Amica System, whereby a senior will provide guidance to a junior on a one-to-one basis.

To put it in another way, it's like a teacher-student relationship between 2 consenting parties, this relationship is called Battle-brothers between guys, and Battle-sisters among girls, putting them together, it's called the Amica System. This is a really long-winded explanation.

"--But Kinji, why are you here so early?"

"Why I'm so early... You came early as well, the cultural festival only starts at 9am."

"Ah, well... I, I asked first, so you have to answer me first."

For some reason, Aria's face started turning red....

If I answer with "It's all because you threatened me in the past", she'll definitely be unhappy.

"I just... happened to arrive early, there's no other meaning."

"Ah, I happen to be the same, there's no other meaning, really no other meaning at all. It's not because I can be alone with Kinji that I came early, so you better don't be mistaken."

Aria puffed her non-existent chest proudly as she spoke--but, isn't the front half of your reply copied from mine.

I lowered my head to look at my watch--it's 8.45am now.

There's still some time.

"By the way, you've seen it right?"

"--Are you referring to Tamamo?"

Sweeping her gaze at me, Aria asked.

"Yes, so how was it?"

"It's nothing much, or rather, after knowing so much, I felt a peace of mind."

Her twin-tails drifting with the wind--Aria definitely looked very calm.

Just like usual.

That's really impressive. I totally lost it during the Bandire.

"So what did you talk about?"

"Oh, the Far Eastern War, Baskerville joining the war, Deen and Grenada, although I have no recollection of seeing Hilda during the Bandire... but, it seems that it was because the Suggestive Arts was used on me, and also, the golden shell being taken by force... Although I only have a hazy impression, but one of them has been

placed back in my left chest... so, I believed it. As of now, the Hidan in my chest has only 3 fragments of the golden shell with it.

--I've also heard, if we leave it like this, a dangerous event will occur."

"The danger you are referring to...."

"I wasn't told the details. Do you know what it is?"

I.... nodded.

".... Wanna know?"

"It's ok if you don't say, I can tell from your expression, there's still a fair bit of time, perhaps measured in years."

Aria, with her sharp intuition that even Sherlock Holmes had to admit defeat to--

Correctly guessed her symptoms.

".... You're really calm, after hearing such major news."

"Don't underestimate me, Butei are frequently on the battlefield. Afraid of being injured or dying in the line of duty, is as good as not doing your job. Don't tell me--if it were you in my situation, you'll become spineless."

Aria looked at me sharply with her gaze.

I shook my head, so, Aria stood up at the first lane of the swimming pool with her hands on her hips.

"--The targets are 4 members of Grenada. Patra, Shokatsu, Katze Grasse and Havi. But Kinji, as my mother's next trial will be the final sentencing... so there's a need to arrest Patra, the leader of EU's Ignatius. Shokatsu's organization, Ranban, has dealings with EU, and has a member from the remnants of EU."

Aria began describing the situation of each enemy.

"The woman, Katze Grasse, is EU's OB[15], she's in the Witch Company[16], which is an infamous spying and terrorist organisation. The women are all hired by Libya, Iran, North Korea for high fees. As for that girl, Havi, I'm not too sure about her.... but since she's related to Grenada, there's a need to thoroughly investigate her."

"....In other words, they're all enemies you need to defeat in the first place."

"Yes, so it doesn't matter if there's a time limit. Or should I say, I don't need that much time. Before mother's final sentencing--March next year, I will succeed."

Speaking with the usual vigor and drive, Aria suddenly--

Swung her pink ponytails, turning her head to look at me.

"Kinji, what are you going to do?"

"Shirayuki and Tamamo are allies, Reki and Ranban have their connection, you are aware of Riko's intent to fight, she doesn't want me or Kinji to be killed by other enemies, But, thinking about it carefully.... you're just dragged into this mess Kinji, there's no need for you to participate in the battle."

Being asked by Aria in all seriousness, I--

"... This is Butei Charter 8 as well."

The moment I decided to answer, I confirmed what I knew long ago about my own situation.

"The mission must be resolved completed, since I interfered with EU, I got myself implicated into the Far Eastern War. Regarding this, you reap what you sow, this is the principle of a Butei."

Even before considering this, there's the humane principle as well.

If we compare this to a fire disaster.... because we tried to put out EU's flames, the sparks created spread the fire further.

After all, the reason of putting out the fires is not enough by itself.

"Like what you said, there's no need for me to be involved... but I have already planted the seeds of hate, Jeanne has told me this as well. After all, the one who defeated Sherlock--your great grandfather--and destroyed his EU is me. Patra and the rest of the gang must be aiming for my head. Just like how Hilda came seeking revenge for Vlad, who knows when Koko's accomplices will attack me."

That's right, the fire was not put out completely--remnants of EU still remain.

They have received the fuel named as Grenada, and intend to revive the powerful flames.

From the looks of it, it's just that I haven't been attacked yet, but returning to a normal life is no longer possible.

"I'm just a normal high school student. In order to turn this into reality, these guys are obstacles, If I return to school without resolving everything, it could bring trouble to other students."

I said everything in one breath--

"Kinji...."

As if obtaining a dependable comrade, Aria displayed a joyful expression.

I'm only E-ranked, so I can't be counted as a dependable comrade.

(And, perhaps Aria found it hard to say it out....)

But I understood when Aria became involved with EU, and when Riko got into trouble.

--I can't let myself sit out for this one.

I can't leave the people fighting those freaks, super-humans and monsters on their own... and moreover, they're girls.

I must protect them, after all, I am a man.

This isn't for the sake of garnering their affections, or trying to get their gratitude, but it's out of public morals, the men must protect the women.

.... Seriously, I can only blame myself to be born in the sex with no benefits.

Just that--

"The deadline is March next year.... to resolve everything before Kanae-san's final sentencing. It'll be alright if we can do that."

"Un, yeah."

I looked seriously at Aria, she nodded her head.

"Starting from April, I'll be going to a normal school. So, the Far Eastern War--will be my retirement battle as a Butei."

Listening to my declaration.... Aria didn't nod her head.

She wanted to say something, but stopped herself and turned her head to one side.

"Aria, I've told you this when I met you..."

I hesitated, and was about to voice out my wish to transfer out from Butei High.

Aria hurriedly extended her hand to stop me.

"I understand, so please don't say anymore."

".... Do you really understand?"

I asked with some doubt. Aria hugged her arms, raised her eyebrows and answered.

"Yes, although I can't accept this. Once you encounter a situation, you'll display world-class bravery.... You obviously possess such talents, but wish to retire... this is one point I'm unable to accept.

Kinji, things like talent, are like platinum cards in life, and you actually want to throw it away on your own accord--"

"No matter how good the card is, it's just a piece of useless paper when there's no need for it."

"But..."

"We've already talked till this point, do you still need me to repeat myself? It looks like my intent hasn't been properly transmitted to you."

I sat back down at the second lane of the pool, Aria, however--

Lightly dusted off her skirt, and leapt down from the diving platform of the first lane.

"Ah, what a pity, it's time."

Saying this, Aria pointed at the clock tower--it's already 9am.

"Let's not bother about this, listen carefully, I...."

"--The cultural festival has started, it's time for the activities to commence. Aren't the two of us supposed to be resting for today?"

"Yes, but...."

"We need to change our moods when resting, if we're always wound up so tightly, it's only a matter of time before the mental strain breaks us. If that happens, we won't be able to make accurate decisions."

Looks like Aria doesn't want to talk about the topic of me switching schools....

But, not talking about it doesn't mean not understanding.

"In other words, for a Butei, resting is a type of work as well. Let's not talk about those things anymore, for now we'll just relax ourselves. I need a change of mood as well, having an argument with someone you like before going for a date isn't good."

.....?

Aria... did you just....

Did you just say something very weird?

I probably heard wrongly.

"Da... Date?"

I repeated Aria's words--

Maybe Aria had unconsciously spoken those words. Listening to me repeat them, her whole face turned red immediately.

"Ah, I, I... just.... said those words?"

Blushing, Aria started stammering--

And facing her, I must have been blushing as well. Bastard.

In stark contrast to the red faces, were completely blank minds.

Just before the word "date", there seems to be another word which had even more of an impact, but as Aria's slip of the tongue was too stimulating, all my memory flew out into the clouds.

But if our reaction to this problem is overly delayed, it'll make the both of us even more awkward, turning the day into a mess.

So, even though my mind was in a complete mess, I still nodded my head.

"No, never, never, never never never!"

Never never!

Baring her little fangs, Aria entered full denial mode.

Whoosh whoosh! Her hands started waving like a windmill.

"--Today is a holiday, a holiday is a holiday."

It feels like she's saying really weird stuff, but I nodded my head anyway.

"Yea.. yeah, a holiday is a holiday."

"Yes, that's it, a holiday is a holiday!"

Reaching an agreement that "a holiday is a holiday", we left the swimming pool.

That girl Aria, why did she suddenly pitch such a foul ball at me.

In my mind--appeared a scene of Aria falling down on a baseball field after failing to catch a ball, and she just happened to fall into a hole which, for some unknown reason, was on the baseball field. Unlike a vanishing baseball, the one vanishing was Aria instead.

Aria and I continued walking along....

While I was recalling what Aria said just now, her mood switched rapidly.

Walking in the Academy Island grounds, she was gradually getting excited.

It looks like Aria has never seen a Japanese school festival.

"Kinji, what's that? And what's this? What are those girls queuing in line for?"

Everything in front of her eyes generated a large amount of interest for her.

As her follower, I could only provide explanations like "This is a shop selling gun magazine clips, it's total rubbish for Butei High, but can still be sold to people from outside", "These are pirated merchandise of Rilakkuma", "It's a beauty contest for men, Shiranui is really standing out". I'm so exhausted.

And, Aria was moving randomly in all directions, all according to her whim.

"I say, do you have some direction you wanna go?"

I asked.

"Nope."

She immediately replied.

She has no objective, but she's still so happy. I wonder why this is so.

(....I'd rather participate in some activities....)

Just as I thought about it, I found a place to go.

Ambulace and Repier had organised a "Morgue of Horrors and Friends".

Butei High running a morgue, that's really bad for business. And, who are these friends you are referring to? There's just too many tsukkomi here...

(--But, from now on we do have to fight the freaks in Grenada.)

Perhaps this could be some form of mental training for people to get used to fighting monsters.

With that thought in my mind, I called out to Aria, whose reaction to the Morgue of Horrors was unusually mild and was just about to leave.

"Hey, Aria."

"..... Wha... what is it?"

"Let's go in."

I said, as I pointed at the bio-hazard signboard for the "Horror House".....

"Are.. are you stupid? Thinking of going to that kiddie place?"

Aria glared at me for a moment, and then just sat on the ground.

"Are you afraid?"

"I'm n... not... not afraid at all!"

"That's good, than let's go in."

"Ah!"

"Didn't you say you weren't scared?"

"--Of.. of course not!"

Saying this, Aria was contemplating running away at the same time. Well, it's necessary for Aria to undergo this kind of training.

After all, she's the type who had a frightened look on her face after seeing just the external appearance of the Koumeikan mansion in Yokohama.

A Butei must have good resistance when going after unusual targets, Aria, prepare yourself!

I bought 2 tickets, lifted up the black curtain and entered into the auditorium on the first floor of Repier's building.....

Woah, it's pitch black. Time to switch on the pen torchlight handed out at the entrance.

Switching on the torch, I saw bloodstains all over the floor at my feet.

"Iyaa!"

.. Aria suddenly screamed.

"Don't... don't stick to me, aren't you used to seeing real blood?"

"That... that isn't purposely splashed with the intention of scaring people, stupid!"

....*Patter patter patter*

Arguing irrationally, Aria did not even look at the stretchers strewn

all over the place and the damaged operating table, directly breaking into a light run and moving ahead.

"Hey Aria, you're walking too fast!"

"I don't want to waste time in this place! You walk faster as well so we can get out of this place quickly!"

It seems.... Aria intends to express anger to cover her fear.

(...On another level of meaning, I started to feel scared as well...)

As I was contemplating this--

Suddenly, Aria halted her steps.

I caught up to her and used the torch to shine ahead. I could see terror written all over her face.

"There's somebody."

"Of course there is, it's the guy in charge of scaring people."

"You walk in front."

"Alright alright."

I was just about to take a step--beep beep--an alarm sounded.

Red lights started flashing.

"Kyaaa! Waaaahh!"

Aria tried to escape towards her side, but bounced off the wall.

Why is she in such a panic.

Looking closer, I saw that there was a stretcher in front, and on top of the stretcher was a body bag.

There was something in the body bag.

".... Tha.. that bag, there's a dead person in it."

"You idiot, that's just a First Year tasked with scaring people."

"So to say, it's still alive?"

"How do you scare people if you're dead? Hey, don't whip out your gun, that will really result in a dead person."

"This is for just in case."

"Just in case of what. Give me the gun."

"Nnnnononono, what if it's really a monster?"

"How is that possible, I'm just beside you, give me the gun quickly."

"Uuuuuu...."

Aria started crying as she handed the gun to me.

Then, she hid behind me and pushed me in the direction of the body bag.

Hey hey, don't use me as a shield. And to think you're the Demon Butei who scares humans, scatters spirits, and make children cry, Aria The Quadra.

As I was thinking of that...

"Wooooo..."

As expected.

A First Year dressed up as a zombie crawled out from the body bag.

Woah, thanks for your hard work.

"Look, it's just like I said."

I laughed bitterly at Aria who was hiding behind me.

"--WAAHHHHHHH!"

Seeing the zombie from behind me, Aria was so scared her twin

tails shot straight up.

Following that, bam, *sprints*!

She pushed me away, and ran off panicked.

All the while screaming....

This is totally you scaring yourself.

Aria.... Just how much do you fear the supernatural.

Come to think of it, it won't be too long before you have to fight with the real deal.

Since the past till now, horror houses all follow the same model.

To let people walk on a path for some time where nothing will happen, and once they let down their guard, the sudden use of light and sound to scare them.

Aria, who was scared time and again, repeatedly said "Wha.. what. That wasn't scary at all, hu hu hu" and "KYAAAA!!"

And like this, we passed through the first floor, and headed towards the second floor which had been decorated as a hospital.

"It.. it's ending soon right?"

"No... we've only walked one-third of it."

"So long! Think of a solution for me quickly."

"It's no use telling me."

As I comforted Aria, whose twin tails were standing vertically upwards, I walked into the classroom.

"Thi.. this won't do, this place won't do, you have to protect me properly!"

....To actually want someone to "protect" you inside a horror house.

It's really unheard of.

--Seeing the bloody palm prints on the door, Aria's camellia eyes widened into circles in fear as she hugged my elbow tightly. Then she lowered her head, and went into a total no-look mode.

(I really don't know what to do with you...)

If it's like this, won't I be like some sort of guide dog dragging Aria along.

Entering the classroom, just as the first year dressed as a zombie nurse saw us....

".....?"

The path we came from just now, in a direction which was out of the way... came some sort of sound.

I immediately halted my steps, Aria was trembling non-stop.

"What... what is it Kinji, what is it, what is it?"

"It's nothing, I seem to have heard some sound.... it's like a strange crying sound."

"Hhhhhhhoooow can you betray me as well!"

"Betray?"

"Scary things! You're not allowed to say it out!"

She's really still frightened.

"Hmm--it sounds like the crying of a child, Aria, you wait here for me."

Because it doesn't sound like a recording, so I was very concerned.

"--Wait, don't leave me alone here!"

"It can't be helped, it's possible someone is lost."

Leaving Aria behind, I returned to the corridor. Suddenly, *ka-chk*.

Seems like someone was in charge of closing the door. Aria was now locked in the hospital.

"Iyaaaaaaaaaa! Open the door! Open the door quickly! Open the door! Open up for me! Open up the door for me this instant!"

Aria was yelling out in an exaggerated anime-like voice, pounding on the door forcefully....

We should call the first years to give you training to overcome your fear.

And since you usually use "training" as an excuse to kick, beat and even ride me like a horse.

--I'll let you have a slight taste of what I'm going through.

Along the corridor, there could be, no, there really was someone who had gotten lost. It was a 6 year old girl.

"Mama, where are you?"

Hearing her talk, I went forward to make some enquiries.

She seemed to have taken the wrong path, and was separated from her mother.

This is really pitiful. As I was thinking, Aria smashed opened the hospital door with a low head-butt. She started crying and administering punches and kicks to me at the same time.

There's no helping it, I could only cut the training short, bringing Aria and the little girl out using the emergency exit.

As I was explaining the situation to the First Year who was attending to me... the mother of the little girl appeared.

She seemed to have thought that her daughter would be coming out about now as well, so she was searching for her daughter in the vicinity of Repier.

"Mama!"

The little girl flew straight into her mother's embrace. Under the urging of her mother, the little girl bowed her head at us in thanks.

"Big brother, big sister, thank you both."

"This is really a relief, don't get separated from your mother now!"

Aria squatted down, comforting the little girl with the tone of an older sister.

Looks like Aria has decided to pretend her disgraceful behavior just now has never happened.

"Un, that's right, big sister."

"What is it?"

"Big sister, you like big brother very much right."

The little girl said as she pointed at me....

Aria froze.

"Wh... what makes you say that."

"Because, to beat is to show affection, to scold is to show love."

"Ah, I... I just.... It's because Kinji is an idiot, so there is a need to carry out educational guidance..."

The little girl patted the stammering Aria on the shoulder--

"Do your best k!"

Saying this, the little girl then left.

Watching the little girl leave.... Aria's face was blushing red, her entire body petrified.

The joke made by the little kid.... seemed to caused Aria to be thinking about something. Let's not talk about that first... Anyways,

her violent actions towards me should stop now.

Really well done, little girl.

Thanks to her, I no longer have to join the "Morgue of Horror and Friends", I'm really grateful.

After that, Aria started complaining "This is all your fault, you made me really hungry."

I wanted to eat something as well, so.....

We decided to visit the legendary super hot-selling Takoyaki shop, which was located around the Logi building.

"Delicious Takoyaki! C'mon take a look and try it!"

... I heard a familiar voice, which was mixed with a Kansai accent.

The source of the sound came from the "Takoyaki Queen" stall, set up near the car-park.

Passing through door curtains which was printed with strange drawings of wheels drawn to look like Takoyaki....

"Ah, Tohyama Kinji."

"You, add in a "sempai" when addressing your senior."

Muto Takaki.

Logi first year, with a name that sounds like a vehicle braking, but a fearless racing fanatic--

She was looking at me with her beautiful face that doesn't look anything like she's Muto's younger sister.

(The only similarity she has with Muto... probably the height.)

Takaki was only in the first year of high school, and she's almost 170cm tall.

As she was working on the side as a race queen, she's somewhat

famous on the Suzuka Circuit and Fuji Expressway.

"Kinji, what's this?"

Aria, who can never become a race queen, poked half her head over the counter (due to her height, she could only show half of her head) to get a better look at the stall.

"It's Takoyaki."

"But the thing being cooked looks like a ball, it should be called Boruyaki[17] instead!"

"There's no such name. Don't you even know what Takoyaki is. Alright then, let me do the talking."

Muto (sis), who has an interest in making mini 4WD, said mockingly, "Don'cha know what a Takoyaki is? Really, you Tokyoites... should just be run over!"

Then, shaking her tea-coloured ponytail which was almost blonde, she moved closer.

Just a quick explanation, the Muto siblings have a speech pattern which uses "Run you over!" and such.

"Well, so how many do you wanna buy? Since ya brought a girl, ya have to be more generous."

Takaki, you... actually use such a contemptuous tone on a customer, who's also your sempai as well.

Muto that guy too, you should teach your sister properly.

Since the both of you are vehicle otakus.

"Give me 8 then."

"Ahhh--?"

Takaki furrowed her pretty brow, bending over at her waist and looked up at me.

".... 12 then."

"Ah ah--? Just be run over--!"

Saying that, she started smiling and moved her face closer.

Hey hey! Pretty girls shouldn't move their faces so close, won't this cause guys to be unable to resist?

Speaking of which, if I cannot control myself against Muto's sister--it's as good as turning the gun on myself.

"I... I understand, give me 20. Hurry up."

"Thanks for yer patronage! No wonder yer Tohyama-sempai! Yer display of generosity, I will let my big brother know!"

Making a pose from her other profession, her waist shaking slight and blowing a kiss, Takaki skillfully placed the Takoyaki into a paper box.

So this is it.... that girl Takaki has been using this method to increase her sales.

"Lovely Charm Takoyaki Stall", truly a vixen in the business world.

Speaking of which, what do I do with my predicament. I bought 20 Takoyakis, I'll be stuffed to death.

We sat on some chairs on the side to start eating, Aria had bought 2 bottles of Perrier water from somewhere else.

I have always been thinking... Why does Aria frequently consume carbonated drinks?

From what she said herself, "This is common practice in Europe when eating oily food.", but with respect to non-fruity carbonated drinks, I always felt weird.

But, although it's only 2 people eating, water is essential in order to vanquish 20 Takoyakis.

I opened a Perrier bottle and said,

"Each one gets 10, equality for boys and girls."

When I finished speaking, Aria looked at the box, and twitched her nose, sniffing at the food.

Just to add, perhaps it was a habit from Takakai's family, the Takoyaki were to be eaten as how it was made. There was no dark sauce, not even seaweed or tuna flakes.

But there were massive amounts of onions and chilli sauce.

"This isn't a problem, but what kind of food is this."

"Didn't I already say it was Takoyaki."

"WHERE. IS. THE. OCTOPUS!"

This is pissing me off....

"It's inside, and already cut."

Do you need me to explain to such a detail.

(Speaking of which... Before this, Aria doesn't even know what cotton candy is at her age.)

People who have international marriages are really something.

I skewered a Takoyaki.

"Taste it, instead of explaining, try it for yourself."

I presented it to Aria.

Gulp

She ate it without hesitation.

It feels like... I'm feeding a small kitten.

Chew, chew.....

"Ah, it's delicious..."

This is great.

If it wasn't up to her taste, I'd have to deal with the remaining 19.

Aria skewered one as well, bringing it up... *pa*--

The soft "Queen Takoyaki" slipped from the skewer, dropping back into the box.

".... I can't skewer it up."

"Stick it into the piece of octopus inside."

"Are you an idiot? I'm not an ability user, how would I know where the octopus is."

"True.... then use your intuition."

As I said that, Aria poked another one.

.... It still dropped.

.....GRRRRRRRRR.....

Shit, a dangerous signal was emitting from Aria's throat.

"Ca.. calm down Aria. Use 2 sticks like a chopstick. It shouldn't be a problem if you clip it up lightly."

"Uu--like this? Ah--...ah, this is really working."

Come on... come on, Takoyaki.

Don't break. or else I'll become the punching bag again.

sss... sssssss....

"--It's clipped up! Look! The onions are on top as well!"

"Very good very good, nicely done....!"

You didn't break, such strength, Takoyaki!

On the surface it looked as if I was praising Aria, but actually I was praising the Takoyaki.

"Then, open your mouth!"

"?"

"Sai 'arrrrrrr'....." *(Spoken in English using Japanese pronunciation)*

"..........?"

"Say ah....." *(Spoken in English)*

As the pronunciation changed to proper English, I finally understood.

This is the English version of "Open your mouth!".

.... Speaking of which,

Why make me perform such an embarrassing action, it's not as if it's Shirayuki or Riko.

Aria was totally unconcerned with my embarrassment, sending the Takoyaki to my mouth with a super cute smile. (.... Was it because I fed her just now? If that's the case, I'm really asking for it.)

After I confirmed that there was no one I know around me--

I made a decision, and ate the Takoyaki Aria was feeding me with the speed of lightning.

It's really delicious. Although it's already delicious in the first place.... But, defeated by Aria's "Open your mouth!" attack, I felt the tastiness of the Takoyaki went up by several points.

It just feels like.... Aria has been behaving strangely recently.

"Then, next is my turn."

For some unknown reason, there's now a rule of feeding one another.

Aria was behaving excitedly like a kid playing games in kindergarten, chewing on the Takoyaki I fed her.

Everytime Aria fed the Takoyaki to me, I felt so nervous that I didn't even know whether I was full or not... When I realised, the big box of Takoyaki had been finished by the both of us.

"It's really delicious, I should praise you for this."

Drinking her Perrier water, Aria took out something like a lipstick from the pocket of her skirt.

Then, she turned her back towards me and started applying it.

I looked at the cover she placed on the chair... the word 'Dior' was on it.

"What are you applying?"

"Lip gloss. I don't use lipstick, though Jeanne does."

Lip gloss?? Lipstick?

Is there a difference?

"You.... go out to buy cosmetics too?"

A pint-sized Butei armed with guns shopping in a cosmetic store?

Thinking of this scenario, I had to keep myself from laughing out.

"I don't go out to buy. A personal fashion consultant and make-up artist are hired to the company, and everything is custom-made for me."

To her, this is probably no big deal right? To say it in such a matter-

of-fact way... that's really something.

I guess this is what nobility are like.

That's right..... Aria is still a girl.

So she'll be very conscious about her make-up as well.

"How much to make one?"

"Your heart won't be able to take it if I told you."

Saying that, Aria placed the cover back on the lip gloss, and put it back into her pocket.

Listening to her.... I became acutely aware of her lips, which looking closely, were shining and reflecting light.

I see, lip gloss and lipstick are indeed different things.

I became silent, and looked at Aria's lips....

"Wha... what is it? I didn't apply it on because I was expecting anything, it's because I just ate something, and the autumn winds in Japan are dryer. I didn't have any sort of strange expectations alright!"

Aria folded her arms and turned her head away as she spoke.

Then--

"To.. today is really memorable. How about you, Kinji?"

She suddenly looked at me... her face was blushing as she asked.

"Ah? Yeah, a cultural festival has to be memorable to people."

"I wasn't talking about this, I meant 'being together with me'."

..... Again with the strange way of asking questions.

But truthfully speaking, I had a great time today.

Because , when I'm with Aria, it's the same as being with my guy friends, there's no feeling of restriction.

Although there are occasional things that make my face blush or heart race, but basically she isn't like a girl. Her child-like appearance makes her look more like my younger sister (although in actual fact I don't have a younger sister), the atmosphere was very relaxing.

"--It's alright, I don't feel tired when I'm with you."

Even though there are all sorts of danger.

I'll keep this sentence to myself. Following my short and simple reply--Aria....

Ho ho....

Suddenly laughed in a shy manner.

"Me.. me too. I'm very happy, except for the haunted house. You're really not bad."

"I don't know what you're praising me for...."

"It's an evaluation for today. Yes.... since it's not often I'm in a good mood, I'll promote you as a servant, starting from now on."

Can Ojou-sama please explain to me what's the bloody difference between a slave and a servant.

But... it feels really strange, for Aria to actually praise me.

Usually I'll just be Aria's personal punching bag. Being praised by her like this, I felt uneasy instead.

"How do I say this... Recently, you've changed somewhat."

As I felt awkward, I turned my head away to the side.

Aria became silent for a while, wiping her hands on her skirt.

I glanced at her from the corner of my eye, and noticed she was

holding out her little finger.

"Of course I'll change. You, made the little finger...."

"?"

"You're really weird.... You're a weird person too."

Saying that, Aria lowered her head.

I could only remain silent as well.

After a while, Aria stole a glance at me, and asked.

"Then, which me is better? For Kinji, the me before? Or the me right now?"

".... Both are good, you're still you."

After replying, I placed my hands on the back of my head--

The both of us continued to sit on the chairs in silence.

As the conversation has ended, I raised my head, looking at the clear autumn skies and feeling the autumn wind blowing on my face.....

Ding.... Dong.... Ding.... Dong....

The sound of the tolling bell came from the direction of Odabai.

It was from the church of Hotel Nikko.

Due to the direction of the wind, the sound could be heard in Academy Island.

"Oh, it's a wedding."

I said with some emphasis.

"--Pfffff."

Aria was drinking the Perrier water, and suddenly shouted

"Wuuaahhhhhhh" like she choked on the water.

Following that, she replaced the cap on the Perrier bottle, and started smoothing her hair in a flustered manner.

This is what she looks like when she's unable to calm down.

"Speaking of which, Aria. what are you doing in the afternoon?"

"Ah, the afternoon? The afternoon... the afternoon I'll be going to Assault to check on the activities of the female juniors. Didn't the Masters put up a notice to say 'Sempais are to verify the activities of their juniors. If there appears to be inadequate preparation, guidance must be given.' !"

"It's good to look after others, but that's not compulsory! When I heard the notice I simply thought that it's for people who want to go, I don't really care."

"It's.. it's fine. We'll end here today. The book did say 'Too much bindings will result in displeasure'."

Aria said some strange stuff as she stood up--throwing the bottle into the trash can.

(Bindings... was it referring to me?)

Recently, didn't you still use ropes to bind me and throw me into the sea for stealing your peach buns.

And that's after shooting me.

"Then.. then bye, Kinji. See you again at the fireworks meet in the evening. If you don't turn up, be prepared to be blasted with holes."

As Aria said these terrifying words, she politely left the place like an obedient girl.

Suddenly, she seemed to recall something, and adjusted her skirt to hide the gun holsters.

This action.... it's the first time I've seen it. That girl would actually

be embarrassed because her guns were showing.

Afterwards, I met up with Muto (brother), and walked around the Cultural Festival with Shiranui, who placed second in the men's beauty contest.

Last year my schedule was packed to the brim with work. Finally this year I have one day of rest...

When Muto and Shiranui went to the CVR ball, which was an activity full of girls, I took the opportunity to slack off.

I can say that up till now, today was the most perfect day I've had for all this while.

The Cultural Festival successfully came to a close at 7pm in the evening as there was no festival at night.....

--So, from now on, it's time for the terrifying "Fireworks Meet".

On the final day of the Cultural Festival, Butei High has a tradition of having each team prepare and eat their own "Butei Pot".

For this, the sports hall was opened to everyone in the evening, and members of Team Baskerville were to gather there.

At this time, everyone was to bring their own ingredients, but...

The type of ingredients brought by each member of the team was determined by whether you have drawn "Hit" or "Miss".

Following the outcome, I was responsible for "Hit". As such, I gave normal pork meat to Shirayuki, who was overall-in-charge of the pot.

To add on, Shirayuki was the other one responsible for "Hit". This reassured me greatly.

But... the ones who drawn "Miss" were Aria and Reki.

Members responsible for "Miss" were to hand over "ingredients that one does not normally put into a hotpot" to the pot IC. This is a rule

for the Butei Pot.

(.....I hope it won't become a problem with those two.....)

Aria has very little knowledge on the hotpot of Japanese culture, while Reki lives a life devoid of culture.

What creative ideas the two extremists can come up with, just thinking about it gave me a headache.

Also, in teams where there are an odd number of members, there will be one person in charge of the "seasoning", and that's Riko.

I guess this can be considered fortunate. If that girl whose mind is filled with fantasies ended up in charge of "Miss" ingredients, she might even bring a can of Surströmming.

("Water tossing", "Butei Pot".... who is supposed to benefit from these crazy ideas...)

As I thought about it, I walked into the sports hall with heavy footsteps--it was already quite noisy with all the people inside.

Many of the teams have started eating from their Butei Pot, and beside some of the seated students, there were several people lying on the ground foaming at their mouth, receiving treatment from Medica students equipped with first aid boxes.

Dammit, what's the point of this activity.

"Ki-kun, over here!"

Sitting like a mermaid on a picnic cloth, Riko was beaming as she called out to me.

Very much enjoying herself from this sort of ridiculous activities, Riko was tapping on the hotpot with her chopsticks while humming a tune.

Just to mention, the hotpot being used is a "dedicated hotpot for Butei Pot".

It was a negative type of inheritance passed down from our seniors, from each generation to the next. It's basically a pot made of clay.

But, the cover of the pot was shaped like a bowler hat.

On top of the bowler-hat cover, there was a small flap that could be opened up... The design was such that even if the flap was opened, you wouldn't know what food you had taken until it's completely out of the flap.

Putting it in another way, even in a brightly lit place, it's still able to create a 'dark' hotpot, it's an artifact that emanates demonic aura.

Besides Riko--Aria was sitting cross-legged on the picnic cloth, Reki was sitting in a squat position, Haimaki was sitting on top as well, and--

"It's being cooked now, Kin-chan, thank you for the meat."

The only one sitting in seiza was the IC, Shirayuki, who was adjusting the fire of the stove.

Wearing an apron around her school uniform, Shirayuki opened up a space for me, so I sat beside her.

"Cone-------pepper-----"

Suddenly, like Doraemon whipping out a secret tool, Riko started yelling!

--She started stuffing alot of chili into the flap!

"Wah!" "Kya!" "...."

Aria and Shirayuki stared with wide eyes, while Reki looked on silently at the pot.

"You... you.... what did you add inside! This will turn it into spicy hotpot!"

Seeing that Riko was still thinking of adding more chili, I started shouting.

"But Riko loves to eat spicy stuff. Cone----pepper----!"

Riko said loudly.

And added in some more--!

The cone pepper, simply put, is a type of chili.

A single one would have made the hotpot unbearable, and she actually put in twenty pieces. Is she trying to kill us?

".... Kin-chan, the person in charge of the seasoning can put anything she wants, this is the rule. But at least we will die together."

Shirayuki said, as she took out an expensive-looking embroidered handkerchief to dab her tears.

"There's no need to follow this type of rule! Riko... if you put one more inside, I'll execute you! Aria, Reki, remove your safety catches!"

As the team leader, I will no longer tolerate further acts of violence.

We removed the safety off our weapons together.

"Hurmp, let's make it slightly sweeter then."

Saying that, Riko took out a pack from a bear-shaped bag, opened it, and poured everything into the hotpot with a whoosh!

.... Art.. artificial sweetener...!

That's the artificial sweetener which is 4 times sweeter than normal sugar.

Simply put, it's like pouring in 2 kilograms of white sugar.

(I wonder what other hellish stuff has been added into the pot when I wasn't around.)

The seasoning alone for the hotpot was already enough to make me uneasy, this is the first time in my life I encountered such a

situation.

.....Buruburuburu....

The hotpot was giving off a weird smell, and emitting purple gas, this hotpot....

"Hee hee, it looks really delicious, the taste will top everything else in the world..."

Seeing Riko taking out a packet of seasoning sauce,

"Shirayuki, is it done, I think it should be cooked right?"

I hurriedly prompted Shirayuki to hurry up.

"Un, I think it's done, although I'm not really sure myself when it can be considered done...."

"Ok, then--let's hope this cultural festival will end smoothly, with no one dying..."

As the leader, I hurriedly gave the speech to begin the feast--

"Alright! Then Aria, taste it!"

"Shi... Shirayuki, the overall-in-charge should start first."

"Ehh... Then Reki, how about you give it a try?"

"Riko should be the one to start eating first."

The girls ignored my speech, and started to push the task to each other.

My existence... is really pathetic...

"Then, let's have Ki-kun go first!"

"That's right, let the leader start first!"

"Kin-chan, I'm sorry, but.. but, there's normal food inside as well, so..."

"Kinji, do your best!"

You guys....

But, as it's four against one, there's nothing I could do. After all, the girls were pretending to display their weapons accidentally.

--There's no choice.

I'll just have to suck it up and do it.

"....The sakura, falls with the wind, drifting, scattering..."

Singing a tune to bid farewell to the world, I held the thought "If I die you all won't be able to live much longer too" to comfort myself, and went first.

Holding a bowl.... with my hands trembling.... I brought up the food... *pa*!

....Pea.... Peach....

.....Peach bun....!?

Like a corpse, the peach bun surfaced.

Aria, this must be your handiwork!

Maybe you would have liked this, but the filling has already been exposed from the melted skin of the bun. Have you ever thought what the taste would be like?

"To be considerate of others before you act", do elementary school students in foreign countries not learn about this?

And... on top of the peach bun, what... what the hell is that thing?

On top there was a half-melted thing, which should have originally been some brown-coloured rectangular object.

(What.. what is this....? Is this wheat bran...?)

Transferring the thing to my bowl, I picked up my chopsticks, the

apprehension in my heart greater than when I was attacking E.U.

"....." "....." "....." "....."

Including Haimaki, everyone was looking at me as I placed the "wheat bran" lookalike-thingy in my mouth....

"Guh.... Ah..."

--That girl Reki!

You actually put wafers into the pot.....!

And it's cheese flavored.

The thick cheese flavor mixed with the seafood soup, resulted in an indescribable taste.

However, by a remarkable stroke of fortune, the chili was neutralized by the artificial sweetener.

It's practically a miracle. Putting aside the food, at least no one will die from drinking the soup.

Using whatever determination I had, I finished the peach bun saturated with soup--mission accomplished.

Also, as there was an each-person-a-scoop rule, the girls started playing rock-paper-scissors to decide who's next.

The first was Aria.

"....Wah...."

She scooped up something black, a mass of black stuff.

"Reki! This is your doing isn't it?"

After an interrogation by a furious Aria sitting on top of Reki, that thing appears to be blueberries which Snipe uses for the purpose of improving their eyesight. This explains the purple gases emitting from the soup.

Aria forced the thing into her mouth unwillingly, gulping down milk from a cup in her hands to wash everything down.

"Uhhh.. May the heavens protect me, may the heavens protect me...Uhhh..."

Shirayuki started to pray. Maybe because her behavior was usually prim and proper, she scooped up a cooked egg.

As Shirayuki was shedding tears of joy, Riko, who was sitting beside her scooped up...

"Woah, Reki!"

It's flour noodle... But, artificial sweeteners had crystallized and enveloped the noodles, turning it shiny.

How did this happen.... I was very shocked. Riko said "It's delicious", and calmly ate the flour noodle. Don't you find the flour noodles strange at all, and your sense of taste as well.

After Riko, was Reki.

With the usual expressionless look on her face, she stirred the ladle up and down... *whisk!*

"....!"

Sitting beside her, I broke out into a cold sweat seeing what she had scooped up, a full ladle of chili.

"....."

Reki placed the chili into a bowl.....

Breaking apart the chopsticks--with a gleam in both her eyes--

whisk

swallow, swallow

She really ate the chili.

In a calm and collected manner as usual.

whisk.... swallow*, *whisk.... swallow, swallow*.

She ate all of the remaining chili as well, like she was eating fries.

"...Are.. are you alright...?"

I asked worriedly. Reki nodded her head slightly.

Her eyes were devoid of emotion, and showed no signs of distress.

(....This is too ridiculous...)

....Afterwards....

The disgusting traditional activity had ended, and all the demonic ingredients were removed from the pot, so that everyone can slowly enjoy it.

As they say, the pet follows the image of its master, Haimaki actually started to eat the ingredients happily as well.

Isn't this cruelty to animals?

--At this time, Shirayuki said,

"Well, I'll remove the foam."

Using this as an excuse to change the entire soup.....

After she used a cloth to sanitize the pot for a new lease of life, the normal hotpot can begin. I can finally feel at ease.

"Shirayuki, there should still be some food left."

"Un, the pork meat from Kin-chan.... there's still cabbage and mizuna, carrots, mushrooms, spring onions, gobō..... ah, and slices of Yonezawa beef."

"Un.... that's great."

"We can still make something decent."

Like confirming weapons and equipment, Aria and I made a thorough inspection of the food, gave out orders, and Shirayuki started cooking.

Just like that--

The members of Baskerville crowded around the hotpot once again. At this time, Riko...

"--This meat is painstakingly prepared by Riko for herself!"

Pa!

Palmed in the eye, the beef I had picked up was snatched away in mid-air above the pot.

"That hurts... Isn't it the same whoever prepared the meat! I haven't eaten any meat yet!"

"From now one, this is Riko's territory, Ki-kun is forbidden to enter!"

Saying that, Riko decided on her own to use stalks of spring onions to draw out a boundary.

Then, she ate the boundary as well, leaving me with no idea how to react.

Looking at Riko eating the meat with gusto, I was starting to panic. I asked Shirayuki to pass me some meat... under the watchful eyes of the everyone else, I picked up a piece....

"Arrwooo!"

"Woah?!"

This time, the ambushing party was Haimaki, who snatched the meat from the side.

You--

Normally you eat all sorts of junk, why on earth do you have to eat

my Yonezawa beef today!

"Give it back!"

"Arrwooo!" . With my anxiety pushed to the breaking point, I no longer cared about what others might think of me. I tried to snatch the food back from Haimaki's mouth, but was ultimately no match for an animal, and the fight ended with me being bitten a few times.

I say, Reki, don't just sit there in a daze, help me! Aren't you the owner!

As I turned my head back for help, I saw that while I was fighting with Haimaki over food, she was--

"Japanese beef is really the best in the world!"

"....."

Aria and Reki were both eating the Yonezawa beef first.

Aria, who was scared of burning her tongue, kept blowing at her food, so she was eating slower... But, what made things worse was that Reki had activated her infamous "non-stop eating" mode. Why does it have to activate now, stop... please stop.

"Kin... Kin-chan, there's still some meat!"

Shirayuki told me as she picked up a cooked piece of beef, but,

"This beef was cooked in Riko's territory! Ho ho!"

With lightning speed, Riko extended her chopsticks and snatched the beef away.

"Hey! That's so rude! I picked it for Kin-chan!"

Even though Shirayuki tried to use the pot cover as a shield to defend--

Riko used Aru＝Kata with chopsticks in both hands to snatch away the meat.

"Kyaa, meat! The meat picked for Kin-chan!"

"Haha, it's really tasty! Thanks Shirayuki!"

That girl Riko....!

Finally, all the Yonezawa meat were wiped out...!

But.... the battle isn't over,,, there was still pork meat.

"You guys--this is brought by me, at least let me eat a bit."

Displaying a seriousness which I do not usually have, I drew out my DE (Desert Eagle) as a further threat.

As I have been having some money problems.... After Watson treated me to the steak that one time, I practically didn't have a good meal with any meat.

If I don't eat some now, I don't know when will be the next time I get the chance to eat meat.

Seeing how determined I was, the girls toned down a little as well--in order to combat Riko, Shirayuki used some mizuna to set up a boundary, designating that area as my rented zone to cook the pork for me.

Thanks to her assistance... I can finally eat meat. Even if it's just

pork.

"This is great, Kin-chan can finally get to eat Kin-chan's meat."

"Don't put it in such a disgusting way..."

"Here, please enjoy."

I put out my bowl towards Shirayuki who was handing the meat to me....

".... Ah, it feels so warm when having hotpot."

For some reason, Shirayuki started to use her hand to fan her chest at this time.

"....."

While receiving the meat.... Within Shirayuki's apron, at the chest area of her sailor uniform....

(Bla... Black....!)

It's exposed!

I can see your "competition" underwear.

"......!"

Feeling the excited rush of blood flow in my nose, I quickly took the meat and turned my back.

Re-adjusting my sitting position, I heard a soft dissatisfied sound of "Chey!" coming from behind me.....

Just then, *thump*, *thump*, the sound of combat boots approaching from the side--

"Guh...?"

I'm actually floating in mid-air.

Like a kitten being wrung at the neck, I was lifted up.

Single-handedly lifting me who weighs 60 kilos, and sitting in the space I was forced to vacate was....

"Ran... Ranbyou... sensei."

"--The cosplay cafeteria was given pretty good evaluations by the customers. Profit margins were higher than last year, all of you have done well."

Taking my bowl by force, Ranbyou helped herself and picked up the chopsticks, eating and chatting at the same time.

(My, my meat is all gone... I didn't even manage to get a single bite.)

This is, reality.

The lion cub, raging bull, mountain cat, hawk, silver wolf, and now with the addition of a female leopard coming over to fight for food, a weak human like me stands no chance whatsoever.

Speaking of which, is Butei High an Animal Kingdom?

"--And Reki, the poster you drew for the cultural festival has been awarded first place by the public vote. There's a prize to be presented to you, so come get it from the staff room later."

...Ah?

Under the stares of everyone in Baskerville.... Reki nodded silently at Ranbyou.

"Reki... you can draw as well?"

I was thoroughly stunned.

Reki nodded her head.

"The posters collected were not enough, so all the posters from students who could draw were used. Recently I made a drawing with 'Dreams' as its theme, and it was used to make up numbers."

"Dreams....? Reki, what did you draw?"

Aria, who was rarely shocked, had widened her eyes.

"--I drew the Dream Demon from the legends of my birthplace."

Patting Reki who answered in an emotionless manner, Ranbyou spoke.

"Reki's drawing was fantastic. Take a look for yourself."

Saying that, she showed us a photo of Reki's drawing she had taken using her handphone's camera.... The girls were all stunned.

Being thrown outside the picnic mat and unable to get a first hand look at the picture, I looked over towards Ranbyou's phone....

"Whoa...."

--The phone display showed an extremely realistic drawing which looked like it was drawn by H R Giger.

Although the thing showed in the painting was a strange combination between some sort of animal and bird bones, but the drawing was certainly very well drawn.

That type of creature may not exist in reality, but it was drawn so realistically like a photograph.

"This is really awesome... you really drew this?"

Hearing my question, Reki nodded her head slightly.

....Such artistic talent.

In Baskerville--Shirayuki was skilled at ink drawing, Riko was also able to draw shōjo manga-like illustrations.

But Reki was on a completely different level.

There won't be any problems with turning into a professional artist right? With such brutal capabilities.

Constantly maintaining their guns with care, tirelessly carrying out slight adjustments, being able to remain highly focused when ambushing a target--many snipers are good at drawing.

I've heard of such rumors... But, it looks like the rumors are true, and Reki is such an example.

"....."

As if not hearing the praises from everyone, Reki herself was behaving calmly. But, her talent was really unexpected.

I say... you should just quit being a sniper and switch jobs to become an artist instead!

That's what I felt from the bottom of my heart.

And this kind of work contributes to the world as well.

--Switch your job, quickly.

(Just like myself.... who will be transferring to a normal school.)

As I thought of this, I looked at Aria and the girls surrounding Reki and heaping praises on her.

In actual fact, I....

Was planning to hand in my application to the Masters to transfer from Butei High to a normal high school.

If I want to transfer school by April next year, I'll have to hand in the application before the deadline of October 31st, which is before midnight today.

Considering the fact that I may change my mind, I had even submitted an application to extend the deadline.....

But, it looks like my decision hasn't changed.

This kind of life, will only result in death and destruction one day.

(So--there's still about half a year's time. Half a year from now, I

won't be able to be like this anymore... leaving this group of people behind. By then, it'll really be....)

As I thought about all these, I looked on at my comrades who had crowded together.... In the first half of the year, I had--

Discovered a new side to everyone, just like the Reki right now.

Sometimes on the battlefield, sometimes, in everyday life like this.

And not just from the members of Baskerville.

But also from Jeanne, Watson, and myself--discovering many new things.

(Well, not counting the parts on shooting and slashing at each other. Discovering all these things... it's really nice, and it's the same for Butei High too.)

As I was not good at dealing with girls, it caused me some grief... But, having lived with eveyone for some time, I could feel that all of them were my true comrades.

Even if I'll only be staying here for half a year, but before I leave--Team Baskerville is to me,

Still a wonderful place to call my own. Here, there are comrades who can help each other out.

--So, I want to protect them.

In the remaining half a year that I'm in Butei High, I'll protect them with my all.

To protect this place I call my own, to protect the important comrades in front of me.

(After all, I am still the leader of Team Baskerville.)

As these thoughts ran through my mind, I gazed serenely at Aria, Shirayuki, Riko and Reki.

Epilogue: Go for the Next!! The G Bloodline

October 31st in the middle of night, I submitted the school-transfer form to the Masters unscathed...the next day was Sunday.

The cleaning up of the Cultural Festival is left to the first years, so I shopped around for civilian's quests in the Inquesta's PC room to pass the time.

The problem of the hour is that I must solve my own financial problems. I must quickly do something for the left hand's 'Orochi' payment to Hiragai-san.

And having that in mind I searched for some jobs...but there aren't any good ones. The only missions with high reward are all dangerous jobs.

There was one job, being a bodyguard...but that is also no good. It's for protecting a princess from some big company. I can't have any more encounters with princesses. And so, as I was picky with requests, it is now evening, and I still haven't found any jobs.

In the midst of not speaking to anyone for about a day, at night, at the Master's request board I finally got the job I was searching for.

While looking at the printed paper in my hand, I returned to the boys' dorms—

"……?"

There was a trail of blood running down the corridor. Blood itself is not something rare in Butei High School, but the blood trail led towards *the direction of my room*.

A little worried, I quickly rushed to the door—

“……!”

The silver wolf Haimaki was crouching in front of the door.

“What happened……!”

Haimaki was hurt badly. His silver hair was saturated with blood.

To the panicking me, while trembling, Haimaki handed me the cellphone he was holding in his mouth.

Those eyes looked as if he had just handed something important to someone he really trusted.

If you look at the cellphone—it was Reki’s. The light-green waterproof cellphone was wet with blood.

Although it was someone else’s cellphone, because of the situation, I opened it—

“……!”

I couldn’t understand at first what I was seeing. It seemed like the last thing the cellphone did was take a photo.

At the bottom of the screen it asked “Do you want to save it?”—

The picture showed—

(Wha….what, is this……!)

Silver and Black, Governments.

The Japanese sword—Irokane Ayame.

The silver Remington Double Derringer.

And—a Dragunov sniper rifle.

Aria, Shirayuki, Riko, and Reki’s weapons are piled up easily……!

As I looked at that picture, appalled—

--pipipippipipipipipi—

The ringtone rung, from Reki's cellphone.

On the screen, it showed "Call from unknown number incoming".

I accepted the call with trembling fingers—

"You finally picked up, you're so slow!"

I heard a low voice, and for a second, a man's face was shown on the cellphone screen.

A face covered with tribal-like war paint.

(……This guy……)

I remember seeing him.

He is the guy from last month, present at the Bandire on the Empty Island—G-III.

He was the one that told everyone to bring someone strong over… the one that seemed to like fighting the most.

--The cellphone's image shook.

"H…Hey!"

"Fourth, look. This is Tohyama Kinji."

G-III's voice was heard from outside the image, and in place was a person that had been handed the cellphone.

"……?"

The face—

I caught my breath.

She was a beautiful girl with sharp eyes. Her age is a little younger than mine. She wore goggles with a HUD (Heads Up Display), fashioned like red sunglasses, behind each ear she wore something that looked like a sensor.

Her slender upper body is equipped with matte black body armor. There is a futuristic tactical blade on top, and there a few other blade-like weapons between her waist and back.

But, what surprised me, is not just this mechanical, offensive equipment.

Even though this is the first time I've seen her—

I feel I know her.

I know her……not that I had direct knowledge of her, but that I felt kinship with her; such feelings arose within me.

This girl—is closely related to me.

This difficult-to-describe feeling flowed all through me, even if this was my first time seeing her.

Who……who is she exactly……

"—Wow, I like it. Compared to a photo, video is definitely better!"

The girl who approached the screen joyfully had beautiful chestnut hair—that soft hair bouncing, her voice sounded terribly excited.

"Who are you—you bastards!"

I shouted at Reki's handphone—

"I'm G IV (G Fourth)—Call me by my product number, I have no name."

That maiden narrowed her black eyes and replied.

G Fourth……?

"What happened in that photo……? What did you guys do to Aria and the others?"

"I didn't know which one was Onii-chan's girlfriend, so I finished them all."

……?

O-, Onii-chan……?

“Those girls that approached Onii-chan—I’ve killed them all! If there are any others, I’ll have to kill them too. Onii-chan has to enter HSS mode by using me starting today—Wa, I actually said it. That’s so embarrassing……! I felt excited just by saying these words……! Oh no, I’m really impure!”

Hahaha! The girl raised her head and laughed—my mind went blank.

What, what, what.

Just what on earth are you saying.

I recalled the words she spoke, only then noticing, she keeps calling me “Onii-chan”.

A younger sister, I don’t remember having one.

We are the Tohyama brothers, there’s only Nii-san……and I.

“What……are you guys actually?”

I tried my best to calm myself down, and said these words.

The screen shook again, G Third appeared once more—He looked at me, and with a scornful tone, he spoke.

“No matter how many times I look I still find it hard to believe. Is he really the one who took Sherlock out?”

“—Hey! Both of you……are IU remnants!? Answer me, what are you guys!”

“Shut up! Do your worst! Fight!”

From G Third, who only replied with these three sentences—

The direction of the camera of the video phone suddenly changed.

The view shows an empty theater, and the girl called G Fourth who spoke with me just now napping—

Next to appear, is a stage showered with limelight.

What appeared on the stage……

“……!!”

The girl that participated with me in a cheerful culture festival—Aria.

The girl in charge of the pot during the Butei Pot event—Shirayuki.

The girl who returned alive after battling Hilda, and gained her freedom—Riko.

The girl who revealed her unexpected drawing talents, and was praised by the Masters—Reki.

The four members of Team Baskerville, are covered in blood—

They laid lifelessly on the floor, just like those piled weapons.

Afterword

Hey everyone, sorry I've made you wait!

This coming April, the Hidan no Aria anime will finally begin!

Mark the date with a reminder on your cellphone calendar!

-Just as prescribed by the fifth article of the Butei Charter - move like the wind!

The broadcast will appear on TBS, MBS, CBC, and BS-TBS. The production work has been done by the ever-trustworthy J.C. Staff. It's almost as if a group of S-ranked Buteis joined hands in battle.

I, too, have just about never missed any of the storyboard meetings, exhausting myself to the utmost to convey the true personalities of the characters! For all those fans who took the effort to send us letters by QR code, don't worry, your passion has reached us!

Anime aside, the world of Hidan no Aria continues to expand.

Now, via a mobile game, readers can act out the roles of Butei High students in the new game "The Great Battle! Butei School - Hidan no Aria". Draw your weapon (cellphone), and prepare to do battle!

Right now on FLYING DOG's homepage, you can access webcasts by the voice actors of Aria and Shirayuki. Connect now, and start listening right away!

The ability to have something you enjoy right at your fingertips is truly one of the merits of the Internet. To be able to live at this time is truly too amazing!

But let's not forget that reliable partner which has borne witness to history from time immemorial - paper; that Aria is every bit as active! The original work by yours truly, Hidan no Aria AA, volume one, is now on sale by YOUNG GANGAN COMICS. This is a story of Aria and her kouhais, their friendship, and their battles. It includes

also struggles to control supernatural powers and still more actual weaponry!

In the monthly COMIC ALIVE magazine, aside from the existing Hidan no Aria manga, we're introducing a new 4-koma serialization, "Hidan no Aria-chan". This series will introduce the carefree, happy, and relaxed daily life of the characters you love...smaller and cuter than ever.

All of this comes from the final information pages which come after the afterword.

All of this is only able to happen due to your constant support.

And all of this will continue. With everyone's continued support, Aria will continue to proudly forge ahead!

Forward, onward- let these words serve as my farewell!

- Go For the Next! -

March 2011 - Akumatsu Chuugaku

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ Sotobori Dori (外堀大道) is a main road running through Central Tokyo
2. ↑ Grand Slam (大満貫) is a winning term used in Mahjong.
3. ↑ NTR stands for Netorare. It's not a family-oriented word so I won't go into details. Simply put, it's a scenario where your lover is taken by another person. Riko uses the term here probably because of all the Galgames/Erogames she plays.
4. ↑ The 'Python' glove is made by Hiraga Aya at the request of Kinji in Vol 8. It's basically made up of TNK (Tactile Nano Kevlar). He doesn't have enough money to pay for both gloves, so he's using only 1 glove for now.
5. ↑ This basically means that a person is unaware of something happening very close to him/her. Anyone who knows the exact Japanese Idiom is welcome to contribute.
6. ↑ 'Not eating meat already at the mouth is the shame of a man' (Lit. '到嘴肥肉不吃是男人的耻辱'). This is to describe that it's a shame + failure of a man not to make out with a willing female.
7. ↑ Atashi (あたし) refers to 'myself'. Used by ladies, with the intention of acting in a cute manner.
8. ↑ Boku (ボク or 僕) also refers to 'me or myself'. It's normally used by young little boys referring to themselves, in a cute and obedient sense.
9. ↑ The "Lazy" word used here is Lit. 懒懒散散. It was pronounced using "Ranran", which is Ranbyou's online nick.
10. ↑ As mentioned before, for Ranbyou's name, the "byou" means leopard.
11. ↑ Otoko means male/man. Nakasorachi literally addresses Tohyama that.
12. ↑ A Kohai is something like a junior. A Sempai is the senior.
13. ↑ Wooden Fish (Lit. 木鱼). A wooden percussion instrument used during rituals usually involving the recitation of sutras, mantras, or other Buddhist texts.

14. ↑ Mamiya is a character from "Hidan no Aria Double A". She's the kohai of Aria.
15. ↑ OB here stands for Oberkommandierender (The German version of Commander-In-Chief).
16. ↑ Company here refers to a military company.
17. ↑ Boru literally means ball.